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Buffalo Bill, Jr., And His Band of Deadshots

BY ALLYN DRAPER.



Five minutes they stood there, listening to the deep baying of the hounds, until at last the bloodthirsty beasts came in sight, jaws distended and eyes bloodshot. Two keen, sharp reports rang out and two of them fell dead in their tracks.

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BUFFALO BILL, JR., AND HIS BAND OF DEAD SHOTS.

A STORY OF BORDER LIFE.

By ALLYN DRAPER,

Author of "Tom Topp; or, Fighting Against Fiends," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH THE DEADSHOTS ARE INTRODUCED
TO THE READER.

"BUFFALO BILL!"

"Yes."

"You don't mean Bill Cody?"

"No. I mean young Buffalo Bill."

"Cody's son?"

"No, Bill Eaton is his regular name, but the boys call him Buffalo Bill, Jr."

"Oh, I understand you now. This young Bill Eaton has made himself a name on the border as Bill Cody did, I suppose, by killing buffaloes and other game."

"Well, he is as good as Cody ever was at anything he tackles, I reckon. Whatever he goes for he fetches, and don't you forget it."

"Good shot, eh?"

"Deadshot, sir."

"Rifle or pistol?"

"Both."

"I would like much to see him. I am quite fond of real characters. When will he be in, do you think?"

"Looking for him every minute. He's been below after some horse thieves, he and his Deadshots."

"Deadshots! Do you mean he has a band of men like himself?"

"That's about the size of it, stranger."

"Well, by jingo! What kind of a blessed country is this, anyhow?"

"Just the best the sun ever shone on, stranger. Nothing mean about it; mean people don't have any show in it about here."

"I suppose not, but it puzzles me to know how horse-thieves get along out here."

"Why, Lord bless you, stranger, they don't get along at all. We just string 'em up or shoot daylight through 'em whenever we catch 'em. We don't take 'em into a big court-house and let the lawyers get 'em out, but we just put 'em through slick as grease."

"But don't you put the wrong man through sometimes?"

"Hardly ever. We generally get the chap we go for—another one, did you say? The same thing?"

"Yes—make it mild, though," and the barkeeper quietly mixed another glass for the stranger leaning against the bar of one of the most popular saloons in Cheyenne.

The drink was duly prepared and set before the gentleman, who looked at it admiringly, saying:

"That looks good. Suppose you mix one for yourself?"

"Certainly," said the urbane barkeeper. "You don't suppose I am afraid to drink my own poison, I hope?"

"By no means," said the stranger, smiling good-naturedly. "On the contrary, I find you are a man of extraordinary courage."

"How so?"

"You drink your own liquors without the least sign of fear about you."

"Ha—ha—ha! That's good. Here's luck to you," and the two glasses were simultaneously elevated and emptied.

"I will introduce you to Buffalo Bill, junior, when he comes in," added the sociable bartender, as he set down his glass and resumed business—changed the stranger's gold piece to get the price of two drinks.

"Thanks. My name is Crump—Ben Crump, of New York."

"All right, Mr. Crump. Better drop that 'C' in your name, though, and put up a big 'T' in place of it."

"Why so?" Crump asked, suddenly turning and giving the jolly barkeeper a surprised look.

"Why, that would make you a winning card wherever you went, you know."

"Look here, barkeeper, set 'em up again, and be thankful you escaped alive. Set 'em up for the crowd!"

There was a general laugh at this, and about a dozen individuals ranged alongside the counter, each calling for his particular beverage.

For a few minutes the barkeeper was kept busy mixing the drinks for the party. The clinking of glasses resounded through the large saloon, and Crump was declared a Trump by the entire party.

Suddenly the rush of horses was heard without, and the jovial bartender was seen to peer through the little window at the end of the bar.

"That's Buffalo Bill, Jr.," he exclaimed, "and his band of dead-shots!"

"The deuce!" gasped a big, burly, heavy-bearded fellow, putting down his glass and quickly leaving the saloon, followed by two others of sinister appearance.

Crump walked forward to another window and gazed out at a party of young men, some of whom seemed scarcely out of their teens.

There were fourteen in all, thirteen white and one black—very black.

They were all young-looking fellows—mostly farmers' sons, to all appearances, but there was an air of bold independence about them that is seldom seen in men of much maturer years. They all wore their hair loose and flowing, as do all plainsmen of the West.

Dismounting and securing their horses, the party entered the saloon, where they were greeted by Jim Ruggles, the barkeeper, with:

"Halloo, Bill!"

"Halloo, Jim!" responded a lithe, active, symmetrical, smooth-faced young man with flowing hair, and whose frank, open countenance was at once pleasing and confidence-inspiring. "How does the old thing work?"

"Like greased lightning, Bill," replied Jim; "not a jar felt in the entire machinery."

"That's good," said Bill, laughing good-naturedly and showing a set of smooth, white, even teeth, which added greatly to his manly beauty. "I think some good old rye would go down our throats without a jar of any kind."

Ruggles beckoned to Crump, who was standing aside, and said:

"Bill, this is Mr. Crump, of New York, and he is a trump. Somehow I think he spells his name wrong. This is Mr. Eaton, Mr. Crump, when he signs his name, but we call him Buffalo Bill, junior."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Eaton," said Crump, shaking Bill's hand cordially. "Your friend, Ruggles here, has been telling me some hard things about you, so I asked him to introduce me when you came in."

"Very glad to know you, Mr. Crump," responded Bill, in an off-hand way. "Jim is always putting the drinks on somebody."

"Yes—he has just put them on me. Set 'em up, barkeeper, for Mr. Eaton and his friends."

"See here, Mr. Crump, we fellows ain't on the fancy racket. My name is Bill Eaton. That word 'mister' is a kind of stuffed word which we don't like for a cent. Come up, boys, and wet your whistles."

The twelve young fellows who came in with him crowded up to the bar with a laughing, jovial air of independence that was pleasing to a man from the States.

Buffalo Bill took the first by the shoulder and turned him toward Crump, saying:

"This is Ben Nagle, a dead shot, and the fastest runner in the West. He is also one of the 'Blue Hen's chickens,' just in his prime, and as full of the devil as old Nick himself."

Nagle quietly shook hands with Crump, and smilingly remarked:

"Don't you believe but just half what Bill tells you, or you'll be left behind some day."

Bill caught Crump's eye and tipped him a knowing wink.

"This is Tom Travers," continued Bill, presenting another smooth-faced young man who could not have been more than twenty years of age. "Another dead shot, and the most bashful man outside the Lunatic Asylum. But he's a devil in a scrimmage."

Tom blushed like a school-girl as the others laughed, and took the proffered hand of Crump, shook it heartily and turned away without uttering a word.

"Here is Bob White, a dead shot and a saint at the same time, who never swears except—"

"When Bill beats me lying," interrupted Bob, quickly, as he took Crump's hand.

"Just make a note of that fact, sir, and watch him."

The others laughed heartily, and Bill pushed another one forward.

"Burt Edwards," he said; "a deadshot and the best boxer you ever saw. There's nothing mean about Burt."

Burt and Crump shook hands and smiled good-naturedly, while Bill seized another, saying:

"Cyrus Cammack, a deadshot and long-winded wrestler. I knew him to wrestle a half day once with the wind colic and throw it on the last round."

A roar greeted this novel introduction, and Bill pushed up another with:

"Teddy O'Neil, a deadshot and a broth of a boy, who can hold his hand at anything you call for."

"Be jabbers, but yez can out blarney the devil, Bill, me darlint," said Ted, shaking Crump's hand. "Why don't yez sthoph yez chinnin' an' be afther dhrinkin' yer rye?" and Teddy cast a loving look at the glasses on the counter.

There was another roar, this time at Teddy's expense.

"Oh, you're too dry, Teddy!" cried Bob White.

"Dry up!" retorted Teddy, "an' hurry up wid the chinnin'."

Buffalo Bill then rushed forward the others, simply calling their names as they shook hands with Crump.

"Joe Bledsoe, Ralph Homer, Aleck Hefferman, Ransie Wright, Rufe Vamedoe and Jake Sourboch. All deadshots and bad fellows generally."

"Look er heah, Marse Bill. I'm de bestest man ob de lot. Don't ye go for ter lef me!"

"Oh, certainly not. This is Philosopher Jack," said Bill, introducing the negro, whose skin shone like a patent leather boot. "A dead shot and the equal of Socrates in wisdom. He has more lives than a whole stock of black cats, and—"

"Afore de Lor', Marse Bill!" interrupted Jack, "yer'll make de gem'men sick wid yer foolishness. He'll tink we's all chillun ef yer don't close dat gap in yer face."

"Hurrah for Philosopher Jack!" cried one of the party, and the crowd joined in with a hearty good will.

They all drank to the better acquaintance of Crump.

Crump noticed a great assumption of dignity on the part of the black, as he turned to the counter, took up his glass and tossed off its contents.

Buffalo Bill, Jr., saw his glance, and whispered:

"A regular character, and as brave as a lion."

"Cigars, barkeeper," said Crump, determined to give them a rounded treat, and the weed was passed around among the singular band of dead shots.

CHAPTER II.

THE BULLY AND THE DEAD SHOTS—PHILOSOPHER JACK.

THE party lit their cigars, and puffed away as though each individual was paid according to the quantity of smoke he succeeded in extracting from his cigar, and in a few minutes the atmosphere in the saloon was perfectly blue.

"I say, Bill," called Ruggles, the barkeeper, "what luck did you have down below?"

"Caught one," was the sententious reply.

Crump was standing near Bill at the time and asked:

"What did you catch, if I may ask such a question?"

"A horse thief," replied Buffalo Bill.

"Oh! What did you do with him?"

"Took the horse away from him and strung him up."

"Lynched him?"

"Yes, hung him and left him hanging," was the emphatic reply.

"Don't you apprehend that you will hang the wrong man some day?"

"No. We generally catch 'em with the stock, and string 'em right up there. Sometimes, when they are well mounted, we bring 'em down with a rifle shot."

"But wouldn't it be better to have them tried by due process of law?" Crump asked.

"No. We tried that for several years, and the rascals grew as thick as grasshoppers. They'd hire smart lawyers, and then manage to get on the juries and acquit the prisoners.

We are all young fellows who live on farms with our parents, but the thieves stole all our stock nearly, and the law couldn't protect us worth a cent. I got the boys together and organized the Deadshots. We practiced with rifle and pistol until we learned to fetch everything we went after. We never forgive a miss now, unless it is satisfactorily explained. They never pull the trigger until they draw the bead."

"Have you done any good with your Deadshots?"

"Well, I reckon we have. We have thinned 'em out some," and there was a merry twinkle in Young Buffalo Bill's eye as he spoke. "There ain't so many as before. We've swung 'em up all around below here."

"Don't they resist—show fight sometimes?"

"Oh, yes; they swore to wipe us out last year, but the Deadshots wiped out about half of them, and the others skedaddled."

"Have they ever killed any of your band?"

"Yes; a gang of 'em caught two of our boys in Welsh's saloon one night last winter, and filled 'em so full of lead that they couldn't travel worth a cent. They passed in their chips game, though, making every shot tell."

Just then another man called up the party to take a drink with him. He was a rough-looking customer, carrying a Bowie and a brace of revolvers buckled around him, and evidently had whisky enough in him to make him believe himself the boss bully of the ranch.

"Hyer, you galoots!" he cried out, in a gruff, harsh tone of voice, "come up and git yer pison. No flunkin' or I'll make yer chaw lead! Set 'em up, barkeeper; thar ain't nothin' mean about me!"

Some eight or ten others in the saloon at the time crowded around the bar and ordered their favorite drinks.

But Crump noticed that not one of the Deadshots were among the number.

They stood quietly around, puffing their segars, as though the invitation did not extend to them.

"Hyer, you galoot!" angrily cried the bully, stalking up to Burt Edwards, one of Bill's Deadshots, a young man about two-and-twenty years old. "Come up an' take yer pison like a man, do yer hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you, but don't care a cuss about you," was the cool reply of Burt. "As I am not a galoot I am not in your crowd."

"G-r-r-eat grizzlies!" exclaimed the bully, "young man, don't be a cussed fool. Yer don't know yer danger; yer—"

"Oh, dry up, you old blow frog!" retorted Burt. "Go talk to the nigger."

The man seemed utterly astounded at the young man's temerity.

"Do you know who I am?" he yelled. "Do you know that you are cuttin' yerself off in the flower of yer youth? Is there an undertaker in this 'ere town who kin—"

"Stop that chinning," said Burt, "or I will make you."

That was more than the bully could stand. He made a grab at Burt's throat.

Burt dealt him a blow full on the chest that sent him reeling half way across the saloon over against Philosopher Jack.

The black arose from the box on which he had been quietly sitting, gave him a butt in the back with his woolly head, with:

"Keep yer old trash to yerself, Marse Burt."

It was like a steam engine striking him, and the astounded bully went spinning back across the room like a top.

Burt dealt him another blow that sent him reeling back toward Jack, tumbling to the floor, however, before reaching the black battering ram, with nearly all the wind knocked out of him.

But he scrambled to his feet and drew a revolver.

Jack snatched it out of his hand and also seized the other in his belt, after which he gave him another butt, sending him spinning across the room again.

"Dar he is, Marse Burt!" he cried. "Kick him! He ain't got no friends!"

Burt gave him a kick in the stomach that tumbled him over on the floor, doubled up like a jack-knife.

"Great ham bones!" cried another bully, who had been the first to respond to the invitation to drink. "Ain't got no friends, eh? I'm a streak er greased lightnin' and I go for anything black!" and with that he made a

blow for Jack's head with a heavy decanter which he snatched off the counter.

Bob White deftly caught the decanter, wrenched it out of his hand and set it back on the counter.

Philosopher Jack gave the "streak er greased lightnin'" a square butt in the stomach and knocked all the electricity out of him.

"Dis am a bad place for greased lightnin', shuah," remarked Jack, as he seated himself again on the small box he had vacated when Burt Edwards knocked the bully back on him.

Those who had crowded around the bar now became boisterous, some swearing they would wipe out the chap who had interfered with their drinks.

"See here, fellows," said young Buffalo Bill, stepping forward, and facing the party of roughs, "we are not interfering with you. Take your drinks and let us alone."

"Who the blue blazes are you?" demanded one of the party.

"He-he-he-he!" chuckled Philosopher Jack. "Watch that galoot simmer down like de summer breeze! He's a blowin' like de cyclone now—watch 'im!"

"I am Bill Eaton," replied the cool young leader of the Deadshots. "They sometimes call me Buffalo Bill, Jr., and these are my band of Deadshots. You will do well to behave decently while they are around, as they have a peculiar way of dealing with chaps of your style."

"He-he-he!" chuckled Jack, "see dat! Look at dem galoots! Golly, but de rye wouldn't hurt 'em now, dey is so scart."

They had heard of the Deadshots and their daring young leader, and the terror of his name was salutary on such characters.

The bully on the floor got up, received his pistols from Philosopher Jack, who remarked:

"Some folks is like mules—dey nebbber know nuffin' till it's too late tu do 'em enny good. De horse keeps outen trouble, but jackasses an' deir sons wade in, an' ketch de debil."

The bully took his weapons, giving the philosophical black a look of impotent hate, and then stalked out of the saloon, his reputation gone forever.

"How 'bout them drinks?" a miner asked, turning to the barkeeper.

"You can have a drink by paying for it," replied Ruggles, blandly.

"Dat's jes de way ob de worl'," commented black Jack. "When yer pays yer money yer git de good tings what yer wants; but ef yer puts yer trust in bullies what ain't got no grit in 'em yer gits lef', suah—he-he-he—dat's a fac'."

CHAPTER III.

WHICH TELLS OF A HORSE TRADE AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

THE observation of the philosophical black brought out a good-natured laugh from the Deadshots, with whom he was a general favorite, as well as a servant with many privileges, they having hired him for his general good qualities, both mental and physical.

The bummers slowly filed out of the saloon, where the air seemed too chilly for them, and went over to another one on the other side of the railroad.

There they met the bully who had received such rough usage at the hands of the Deadshots.

To retain his prestige, he called out:

"Hyer, you galoots! Come up and have a nip with a gentleman. I'm a swooping whirlwind, and when I get my wind to whirlin' I'll clean out all the cowardly Deadshots in Shyanne!"

A drink being what they were craving at the time, they responded with alacrity, ranging themselves along the counter and calling for their various drinks.

Among those who responded to the invitation were three sinister-looking chaps who had sneaked away from the other saloon when Jim Ruggles announced the arrival of Young Buffalo Bill and his band of Deadshots.

The largest of these three was a dark, heavy-bearded man, whose piercing black eyes seemed to glitter with some unspeakable deviltry.

He quietly drank his glass of whisky and then retired to a corner of the bar-room, followed by the two who had accompanied his exit from the other saloon.

"We could wipe him out to-night," he whispered to one of his companions, "only he has got his crowd with him. It won't do to fool with all of 'em, you know."

"No, they are a bad crowd [to stir up," assented the other.

"We will wait and watch," remarked the third man. "I only wish Jim Bodie was here. Maybe he would manage to wipe some of 'em out."

"But Jim won't be here for a week yet," said the leader.

"Well, we can't help that."

"No, we must wait. Hang it, I fear they have caught Mose and strung him up, as I heard just now that they had caught one fellow below there and hung him."

"I'll bet that was Mose Haley. He had two blooded horses with him."

"Yes, these young devils are ruining the business, hang 'em!"

"They'll ruin it altogether if we don't wipe 'em out soon."

"We'll do that when Jim comes back. We can take 'em one by one and soon clean 'em out."

The man who had been so roughly treated by the Deadshots was now getting brave again, since hoisting in a goodly quantity of whisky, and began to swear great oaths that he would wipe out Buffalo Bill and all his gang.

The other three heard him, and proceeded to cultivate his acquaintance as well as to get at the motive of his dislike to the young leader of the Deadshots.

They soon found out from others who saw the trouble at the other place, and knew that they could make an ally of him and his friends. They lost no time in doing so.

In the meantime young Buffalo Bill and his band at Jim Ruggles' bar began to talk about going home.

The man Crump, who had treated them so liberally, intimated that he wanted to buy a good horse for the purpose of riding around among the farms with a view of locating thereabouts.

"Sell him the nag we saved to-day, Bill," suggested Ben Nagle.

Young Buffalo Bill hung his head a moment in deep thought. The nag belonged to a widow whose place adjoined Nagle's father's farm. Ben knew she would sell it for a certain sum, as she had offered it to his father a week before at the figures.

"How much will you give for a good saddle-horse?" Bill asked.

"I don't mind the price for one that will suit," replied Crump.

"Come out and look at this one;" and the entire party went outside to look at the horses.

Bill showed the nag, which was really a fine animal, inviting Crump to try the saddle, which he did, riding the animal several hundred yards.

"What's your price?"

Bill asked about fifty dollars above the widow's price, hoping to be able to increase her wealth that much, yet hardly daring to hope that Crump would give so much.

"I'll give it. Write me a clear receipt and title to the animal, and I'll plank down the cash."

"Good!" exclaimed Bill. "Come inside and let Ruggles witness the sale."

They returned to the saloon, where the bill of sale was drawn up and witnessed by Jim Ruggles, the barkeeper, and Crump counted out three hundred dollars in bills, and passed them over to young Buffalo Bill, who stowed them away in his pocket.

"The widow will be glad to see me to-night," he muttered, as he turned away to rejoin his companions who remained outside with the horses.

They soon mounted and rode away, going out to the farm-house of the band, feeling contented with their three days' chase of the horse thieves.

They dropped off as they neared their respective homes, until only Buffalo Bill and Ben Nagle remained together. The Widow Simpkins lived near to the Nagles, and the two friends concluded to go to her house together and report the capture and final sale of her nag.

"We found your horse, widow," said Ben, as soon as they rode up in front of her gate, where she was standing at the moment.

"Gracious me! did you?" she exclaimed.

"What did you do with it?"

"Sold him," said young Bill, dismounting and hitching his horse to the rock.

"Sold him!"

"Yes—for three hundred dollars cash."

"Three hundred dollars!" she repeated, as if the fact was an impossibility.

"Here's the money," said Bill, drawing the roll of bills from his pocket and handing them to her. "Ben said you offered to take two-fifty, so I took the liberty of selling him for you, guaranteeing the title in the presence of witnesses, signing your name to the receipt and bill of sale."

"I—I—am so glad," said the widow, "that I don't know how to thank you."

"Just give me a receipt for the money, then, and it will be all right; I am glad you are pleased with the sale."

"Of course I am pleased—come in, both of you, and I will write a receipt."

They entered the house and in a few minutes the widow brought in a receipt for the money which young Buffalo Bill had given her. They took leave of her after receiving her thanks a dozen times, and went off to their own homes.

Young Eaton reached his father's place in a half hour's brisk riding from the Widow Simpkins' place, and put up his horse.

He had not been more than a half hour's time at home ere one of his neighbors, who lived two miles below the Eatons, rode up to the gate and hailed him.

"Come here, Bill," he said; and young Eaton at once responded.

"What is it?" he asked, as he walked up to the gate.

"I saw a man with the widow's horse in town to-day," said the neighbor, "and I thought I would come by and tell you."

"Who was he?" young Bill asked, a smile on his face.

"He said his name was Crump, and he was trying to sell the nag for two hundred dollars."

"The deuce you say!" exclaimed Bill, greatly surprised. "Where was he?"

"Over by the stock pens on the other side of town," replied the man. "They said he had papers to show a clear title to the animal, but I'd swear to the widow's horse in a drove of a thousand."

"So would I. I am very much obliged to you. I will send word to some of the band and we will go in and see about it."

"Yes, that's what I thought you would do, so I came by to tell you about it. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Bill, and the man rode away, satisfied that he had been the first to discover the horse that had been stolen from the widow.

"What does it mean?" Bill muttered, as the farmer rode away. "Why would he give three hundred, and then sell for two? Something wrong there. By the great Pacific!" and he sprang back as if stung. "I have it. He has shoved counterfeit bills on me."

Without uttering another word, he ran to the stable, caught and saddled his horse, and, though the sun was just disappearing behind the western hills, mounted and sped away like a whirlwind.

"Ben!" he cried, when that brave member of his band appeared in response to his shrill whistle, "get your horse and meet me at the widow's immediately. We'll tell you all there," and without saying more, he put spurs to his horse and dashed away toward the widow's farm.

But just before reaching the Simpkins place, he turned off into the woods toward a solitary cabin a quarter of a mile distant.

Giving a shrill whistle as he came in sight of the cabin, the familiar ebony face of Philosopher Jack appeared at the door.

"Dat you, Marse Bill?"

"Yes—mount and come to the widow's at once!" replied Bill, and then he was off again like the wind.

He reached the widow's place, and found her in a very serene frame of mind over the lucky sale of her nag, and was congratulating herself on her good fortune.

Hastily explaining the cause of his visit, Bill asked permission to look at the money. She produced it, and he gave it a close examination, but was unable to distinguish the bills from others of like denomination.

Ben and Philosopher Jack rode up and Bill explained matters.

"Les' go dar an' see 'bout dat," said Jack. "Dat amn't de way ter git rich. Dat snake bit yer hard dat time, Marse Bill."

Taking the bills with him, Buffalo Bill, Jr.,

mounted his horse, and sped away toward Cheyenne for swift vengeance on the oily swindler who had made a dupe of him.

CHAPTER IV.

PHILOSOPHER JACK AND EQUALITY—BUFFALO BILL AND HIS MEN.

YOUNG Buffalo Bill rode fast, hoping to reach Cheyenne before Crump could consummate a trade or leave town.

Philosopher Jack and Ben Nagle were close behind him, going at a break-neck speed, resolved on seeing justice done the Widow Simpkins.

Night came on, darkness settled down in heavy shadows, but they and their horses knew every inch of the road between there and Cheyenne, so they did not slacken their pace in the least on that account.

At last they reached the suburbs of Cheyenne, and there Buffalo Bill, Jr., checked his speed.

"Go slow, boys," he said, as they rode up alongside of him. "We'd excite too much attention if we dashed in at full speed."

"Dat's fac'," said Philosopher Jack. "When folks is excited dey spiles de fun sometimes. Too much noise scares de game off, suah."

"We'll go and see Jim Ruggles first," remarked Bill, "and see what he knows about that fellow Crump."

"That's a good idea, Bill," assented Nagle. "We may find out something about him there that would aid us."

"An' git anoder drink ob dat ole rye," suggested Jack. "Dis ride hab shook me all up, an' dat's de trouble wide me jes' now."

"Jack," said Ben, laughing, "you have often expressed my sentiments, but never more truly than now. You have spoken the wisdom of inspiration."

"Nebber, Marse Ben; it am de logic ob de stummuck; wisdom ain't got nuffin' ter do wid an empty belly, an' don't you forget that either."

"There's solid wisdom for you," remarked Bill, as they rode leisurely along towards Ruggles' place. "There's a cursed sight more sense than wool about Jack's head."

"Dat am a fac', Marse Bill; he-he-he!" chuckled Jack, "an' it's a smart man dat knows dat, shuah."

In a few minutes they rode up to the horse-racks near the saloon and dismounted.

Buffalo Bill, Jr., dismounted, leaving Ben and Jack outside to watch out for emergencies, both inside and out.

As usual with all saloons in Cheyenne at the time of which we write, there was a motley crowd there, making a night of it.

Bill made his way to the bar, and catching the barkeeper's eye, quietly ordered a drink.

"Thought you had gone home, Bill," said Ruggles, placing a bottle and glass before him.

"Yes, I did start with the boys," he replied, in an off-hand way, and tossing off a glass of whisky laid down a gold coin, and waited for the change.

"I say, Jim," Bill asked, in a low tone of voice, "where can I find that fellow, Crump, to-night?"

"Hanged if I know," replied Jim. "He left soon after you did. I heard him say he was stopping at the Union House, though."

Without another word Bill turned and stalked away, rejoining Jack and Ben outside.

Now Jack had been watching Bill's movements inside the saloon, and saw him hoist the mellow rye at the bar. His philosophic soul was full of envy for the moment, and he grew exceedingly sarcastic as the young leader of the Deadshots emerged from the saloon.

"Youse hab done gone an' done it now, hain't yer? An' yer was too mean ter let us smell ob de glass, an' den—"

"Oh, thunder!" exclaimed Bill. "Go in and fill your ebony skin with rot gut, and be quick about it."

"Dat drink done soured on yer, Marse Bill," said Jack, calmly. "It'll make yer sick, suah. Better take a noder one ter hole it down, case—"

"Oh, go 'long and take your poison," said Bill, getting half angry with the sable Dead-shot.

Jack entered and stalked up to the bar. "Gib us a stiff 'un, Marse Jim," he said edging his way up to a small vacancy near the end of the counter.

"Halloo, charcoal!" cried a tall, shaggy miner. "What are yer doin hyer?"

"I'se gwine for ter take a drink, sah," responded Jack, promptly.

"Gr-r-reat equality!" gasped the miner, glaring at the undismayed son of Ham. "Was yer ever a white man?"

"No, sar. Nuffin' common 'bout me."

"Injuns an' blow snakes! Do yer drink with white folks?"

"Sometimes, when dey behave demselves," replied Jack, filling his glass from the bottle Ruggles placed before him, "an' sometimes I don't," and he raised the glass towards his mouth.

But the exasperated miner raised his foot and sent the glass to the ceiling, spilling the amber-colored whisky all over the woolly pate of the black philosopher.

Before the bully could put his foot to the floor again, Jack turned and planted his head against the pit of his stomach with the force of forty goats, and he went over all in a heap, the sickest man ever seen in Cheyenne.

The crowd roared, and Jack quietly turned to the bar to fill another glass.

By the time he had taken and paid for his drink the miner slowly arose to his feet, but did not straighten himself up. He was too sick for that.

"What's de matter wid yer, boss?" Jack asked, as the man reached for a black bottle on the counter.

He made no reply, but turned up the bottle, and took a long, strong pull at it.

"Golly! but he's a sucker!" exclaimed Jack, as the empty bottle was placed back on the counter.

The crowd again laughed, and the miner, more fully recovered from the effects of the collision, glanced savagely at him a moment, and then drew his revolver.

But ere he could raise it Jack got the drop him—that is, he sprang forward and butted him on the head, and he fell like a log.

"Dat am de biggest fool I eber seed," remarked Jack, as the miner rolled over utterly unconscious.

The African head has always thumped harder than the Caucasian, and no man knew that better than Philosopher Jack himself.

Buffalo Bill, Jr., and Ben Nagle had been witnesses of Jack's trouble in the saloon, and held themselves in readiness to assist him if he should need any help.

But he did not need any help.

Nobody else in the party cared to come in contact with his head, so they allowed him to pass out unchallenged.

"You feel better now, do you?" Bill asked, as he rejoined them.

"Ob course I does. Dat licker won't sour on my stummuck. How is your stummuck, Marse Bill?"

"Ah, go to the deuce! Come along, we've lost too much time already," and Bill led the way to the horses, followed by Ben and Jack.

"We is all agwine dere, Massa Bill, dat's a fac'. Ef we follows yer we'se boun' for ter git dar."

Bill made no reply, but sprang into the saddle, as did the other two, and rode off across the town toward the Union House. They found the place and dismounted in front of it, hitching their horses to the racks put up for that purpose.

Before entering Bill inspected the character of the company gathered there. He saw a number of men there on whom the brand of suspicion had long rested, but against whom nothing positively criminal had yet been proven.

Among them he saw his man Crump, and noticed that he appeared well acquainted for a man just arrived from New York.

The place was well patronized by a tough class of individuals, and on this particular night there was a full house and business was very brisk.

Leaving Ben and Jack outside to keep watch, young Buffalo Bill entered the place and walked leisurely up to the bar, keeping his eye on Crump, however, determined not to let him escape him.

Just as he reached the bar Crump and three others marched up together and called for drinks.

Crump's shoulder touched Bill's, and the young Deadshot greeted him with:

"Hallo, Crump! You here?"

Crump sprang back as if shot, and for a moment seemed utterly confused. But he recovered his self-possession in a second or two and said:

"By hokey! the very man I was talking about. I say, Berry, here is Buffalo Bill, Jr."

The man addressed as Berry turned and gave the smooth-faced young man a close, scrutinizing glance, extended his hand and shook Bill's cordially, saying:

"Glad to see you, sir. My friend here was telling me that he had met you and bought a fine horse from you to-day. I offered him fifty dollars for his bargain, but he refused and wanted a hundred."

"Under the circumstances he could well have taken your offer, I think," remarked Bill, "as money is not made every day so easily."

"No," said Crump, "but when I get hold of a valuable animal like that one I know enough to hold on to it."

"You have not parted with it yet, then?"

"Oh, no. I wouldn't take a cent less than four hundred dollars for him."

"Do you know I have come all the way back to repurchase him?" Bill remarked, looking Crump full in the face.

"The devil!"

"Yes. The widow isn't satisfied, so I came back expressly to see you about it."

CHAPTER V.

THE TRIUMPH OF NERVE—BUFFALO BILL, JR., AND THE COUNTERFEITER.

A BLANK expression came over Crump's face as Buffalo Bill ceased speaking.

He half suspected that the young Deadshot had his band with him, and would have given almost anything then to know the real truth.

"What does the widow say?" he added, after a pause.

"She requests me to tender you the money and bring the horse back home," replied Bill, looking him straight in the eye.

"That is not business," said Crump.

"Well, business is never strictly done on a woman, you know."

"But I had nothing to do with a woman," persisted Crump, growing bolder each moment.

"You knew it was a widow's horse, though, as I told you," said Bill, coolly.

"But you took the liberty of selling the horse and signed her name to the bill of sale. Of course you will have to stand the loss if we trade again."

"Certainly. I expect to do that. How much do you want for him?"

"Four hundred dollars."

"Very well, produce the horse and I'll produce the money."

"Let's have a drink, barkeeper!"

The barkeeper prepared the drinks they called for, and all five of them drank as though everything was lovely, and a man was not a shark preying upon his species.

The drinks disposed of, Crump invited his three friends to accompany himself and Buffalo Bill to the stable where the horses were kept.

They all went out together, and as he passed the threshold Bill signaled to Ben and Jack to follow them.

Under the shadow of darkness the two Deadshots crept along close upon the heels of the party without being either seen or heard.

The hostler of the stable took a lantern and piloted the way through the great number of stalls till he came to Widow Simpkins' nag.

"Here he is," he said, holding up the lantern so as to afford them a good view of the really fine animal.

"Yes, that's him," said Young Buffalo Bill.

"Trot him out."

The animal was led out into the stable-yard.

"Jack," called Bill, elevating his voice a little, "come here."

"Hyer's me, Marse Bill," promptly responded Jack, blacker than the somber shades of night around him.

"Take the widow's horse, there, and carry it back to her," said Bill, at the same time drawing a roll of bills from his pocket.

"Yes, Marse Bill," said Jack, "an' she'll be eber so glad fo' ter see 'im ag'in. She lub's hoss meat wusser den ennybody, she does, dat's a fac'," and the ebony Jack led the nag away, while Jack's leader counted out bills by the light of the lantern the stableman held above his head.

"You gave three hundred for the horse, did you not?" Bill asked.

"Yes," replied Crump.

"And two hours afterward offered to sell him for one hundred dollars less?"

Crump started as if stung, but Buffalo Bill did not look up from counting the bills in his hand.

"I will give you one hundred dollars more than you offered to sell him for, which makes you in one hundred—here's your money—three hundred dollars, the very same you gave me this afternoon," and with that young Buffalo Bill handed him the roll of bills he had just counted.

Crump hissed a terrible oath and laid his hand on his revolver.

"Keep cool, my dear sir," said Bill, looking him straight in the eyes. "You are getting off very cheap if you only knew it. You had better take your money and skip. The next train will be along here at midnight. If it was not for giving it away how badly I was taken in I would have had you in jail two hours ago."

The three men with them made a motion as if to draw their weapons, but Bill waved his hand at them, saying:

"Keep cool, gentlemen, and get away from Cheyenne before sunrise, and—"

"By all the gods of flint!" burst out Crump, in a volley of oaths, "but you have the flintiest cheek I ever saw! If you don't plank down that four hundred dollars I'll plant more lead in your carcass than you'll want to carry!"

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Bill, gayly, as though he were talking to a bevy of young girls. "You are all at this moment covered by the rifles of my band of Deadshots. If you were to draw a weapon you would be riddled with bullets."

Crump turned pale as death, and the stableman shook so he couldn't hold the lamp still.

"Give me the money," he gasped, reaching forth his hand and grasping the bills the young Deadshot had tendered him, and then slunk away without uttering another word.

The others followed, and the stableman crept back to his post, leaving young Buffalo Bill standing there all alone.

A low, quiet chuckle floated to his ears on the cool night air, and Bill knew that Philosopher Jack was pleased with the situation.

He rejoined his two comrades, who had witnessed the game of bluff from the beginning.

"He-he-he!" chuckled Jack, "dat's de way it am. Ketch a man on de guilty side an' he don't know a bluff from er full han', dat's a fac'. He-he-he! Dat's what makes de ghosts so scarsum. De ghosts can't do nuffin', but dey's big on de bluff—scare a nigger clean white, suah, ef he gits 'im whar he can't run."

Bill and Ben chuckled over Jack's philosophy, and quietly wended their way back towards their horses, which were hitched near by.

As they mounted they were seen by Crump and his three comrades, for they had made haste to regain the hotel, where they poured down a glass of straight whisky each.

"Bluffed, by all that's green!" hissed Crump, as he saw the number he had succumbed to. "Two white men and a nigger! I'll get square on that, or my name isn't Ben Crump for this trip! Oh, why didn't I blow out his brains when I had the chance? He found out I had offered the horse for less than I gave, and suspected something wrong at once. This is my field of operations, and either he or I must go under, and I am not often the under dog in a fight."

"He pulled the wool nicely!" remarked one of his comrades.

"Yes—d—d nicely!" growled Crump, savagely, "but I'll bury him, wool and all, for this night's work," and then they returned to the hotel, where they indulged in another heavy drink before going into consultation as to what was to be done.

"We'll have to go to the hills," said the big, burly fellow, Berry, "and set a trap for him, or he'll make it hot for us here."

"Yes, curse him!" growled Crump. "I was just laying my plans to shove a big lot off, and now I have to give it up. He'll be in town to-morrow, looking for us."

"We can start at daylight," said Berry, "and ride up to Crossman's ranch by noon. There are some five or six of our men there now, which, with our party, will make us strong enough to defy those young Deadshots, as they call themselves."

"That's the only course left for us," said Crump, reluctantly assenting to the proposition. "Tell the stableman to have our horses ready by daylight."

The stableman promised to have the horses ready by daylight, after which the four retired to bed.

CHAPTER VI.

PLOTTING AND COUNTERPLOTTING—IN THE TRAP.

WHEN the first streaks of coming day began to be seen in the east, and while the stars were yet twinkling, a party of four men, mounted on swift horses, might have been seen riding out of Cheyenne, going northward.

They were Crump and his confederates, escaping from Buffalo Bill, Jr., and his Deadshots.

They were going up to Crossman's ranch, another one of their confederates in counterfeiting and horse stealing, then so prevalent in the far West.

Crossman's ranch was some twenty-five or thirty miles above Cheyenne, and had the advantage of an immense cave in which stolen stock could be concealed and detection defied.

"There is no mistaking the fact," remarked Crump, as they rode leisurely along, several miles out of Cheyenne, "that we have got to crush out those young fellows, and particularly that Buffalo Bill, Jr., or they will make this section too hot to hold us."

"He seems to be a bold fellow," said Berry, "and full of nerve."

"Bold is no name for it," added Crump. "I have seen some daring men in my day, and desperate fellows, but that young Eaton has more dare-devil to the square inch than any man I ever saw, and nearly every man in his gang is as bad. Even that nigger would tackle a cyclone or butt a freight train going at full speed."

"Then we must get rid of them in some way."

"Oh, if we don't, they'll clean us out. You may put that down and think over it."

"I think I have got a plan in my mind that will settle them forever," remarked Berry, after a pause of some minutes in the conversation.

"What is it?"

"Take a dozen men and go to their homes some night, and take 'em one by one and cut their throats," replied Berry. "I think that would settle them."

"Well, yes, if we can only do it," replied Crump.

"If a dozen of us can't go to a man's house, drag him out and split his wizen, we ought to be wiped out at once," remarked Berry, very emphatically.

"Yes, it would seem so," Crump assented, "but it would raise the country on us."

"The country would not know who did it, and would be awed into subjection even if they did."

"Well, we'll talk it over at the ranch," and then they quickened their pace to reach Crossman's as soon as possible, which they did just before noon.

There were five or six more of their confederates there, who had come in the night before with some very fine stock.

They were received with a hurrah, and a jug of good whisky set before them.

"What luck, boys?" Crump asked, when they had all taken a drink.

"Good," replied one of the men; "we brought in five splendid horses last night, and Silas has changed their spots so completely that we could sell 'em to their owners again," and the whole party laughed heartily at the idea.

The man was right.

If once old Silas Taggart at Crossman's ranch manipulated the spots on a horse, his appearance was so changed that no owner could or would swear it was his horse, unless some action of the animal reassured him; hence, unless the owners and their friends pursued and recaptured their stock before they reached Taggart's hands, they were apt to lose them forever.

"Where are they now?" Crump asked.

"Out in the pasture. Two more are in the cave undergoing a change of dress."

That night Crump and his men held a consultation as to the steps to be taken to get rid of the Deadshots and their young leader.

The consultation lasted until long after midnight, and many a pint of whisky was drank;

but they did not agree upon but one point, and that was that Buffalo Bill, Jr., and his band must be wiped out.

But they went to bed and slept till morning, continuing the subject till noon, by which time they concluded to send two of their number down through the settlement where the young Deadshots lived, and get the exact location of each one's home.

This was for the purpose of eventually making the death raid Berry had suggested to Crump.

The two men who were appointed to this work of spies at once set out on their errand, and two hours later several others left on plundering expeditions, leaving only four others at the ranch—Crump, Berry, Crossman and Taggart.

The sun was just sinking behind the western hills, and the four men were sitting out on the front piazza smoking segars, when they were surprised at seeing a white man and a negro ride up in front of the gate.

"By the ghost of my grandmother," exclaimed Crump, as he caught sight of the new-comers, "that's Buffalo Bill and his black devil!"

The announcement took Crossman so utterly by surprise that he turned in his chair to look, lost his balance, and tumbled three feet or more to the ground.

But he sprang to his feet instantly and started to draw his weapon.

"No—no!" whispered Crump, as he stepped back into the house, followed by Berry. "Not that. Go see what he wants. We may get him into our power."

Crump and Berry kept out of sight, while Crossman started towards the gate to meet the new-comers.

"Halloo, stranger!" yelled young Eaton, as he rode up to the gate.

"Halloo yourself," retorted Crossman. "Won't you alight and come in?"

"Well, I came up to look for quarters. We are out looking for stock that has either been stolen or has strayed away."

"Guess it's stolen," said Crossman, "as the worst set of thieves in the world are now prowling around the country. I lost two fine horsses last week. Just get down and come in. Of course I can give you quarters for the night. Here, Silas, take the gentleman's horses and put 'em up."

Buffalo Bill, Jr., dismounted, as did the colored man, who was no other than Philosopher Jack, and turned the two horses over to old Silas.

"Guess I'll go wid yer," said Jack, as Silas led them away, "case I know dat hoss won't be good ef I don't, an'—"

"Hyer, you nigger!" said Silas, turning sharply on Jack. "Do you think I don't know how to take care of two horses?"

"I dunno, sah—speck as how yer does," replied Jack, "but dis chile goes wid his hoss, dat's a fact."

Now Silas didn't want Jack to visit the stable. He had good and sufficient reasons why he should not go, but he could not give them to him. So he tried a little bluff game on him.

"You just drop into the kitchen and see what you can find there good to eat. I'll look after the horses. That's my business."

"Some folks waste too much ob dere time a talkin'," remarked Jack. "I eats wid my horse—I'm a hoss myself. Ef I goes to de kitchen, my horse goes too, shuah!"

Exasperated at the negro's persistency, Silas hissed at him:

"If you bother me I'll smash your woolly cocoanut for you!" and led off towards the stable, while Bill and Crossman wended their way towards the house.

Jack never knew the meaning of fear in his life, so he went along by the side of his horse, with his rifle on his shoulder, as though he and old Silas were the best friends in the world.

Taggart was enraged beyond expression, and swore inwardly to get even with him ere the sun of another day came.

Jack saw the situation of the stable, the disposition of the horses, and then turned away to go back to the house.

But on the way he ran almost against Crump and Berry, who were going to the stable to get out of the way of young Buffalo Bill, as they did not want to be recognized by him.

He had the presence of mind not to say anything, and they hurried on to the stable

without suspecting that Jack had recognized them.

Bill and Crossman were in the house when Jack came to the door.

"Does your man drink whisky?" Crossman asked, on seeing Jack.

"Will a duck swim?"

Crossman smiled and filled a glass with whisky, and handed it to Philosopher Jack.

"Tanky, sah," replied Jack, doffing his hat, "dat am a comto'ter to de stummuck."

"Give me your guns," said Crossman, when they had taken the drink, "and I will hang 'em up."

"Excuse me, sir," said Bill, "but I never part with a gun when out on a hunt. It does not discommode me in the least."

Crossman seemed puzzled for a moment, and then a look of disappointment came over his face.

But he made no remarks further about the rifles. They took seats on the piazza, while he, Crossman, hurried into the kitchen to give some directions about supper.

"Marse Bill!" whispered Jack, as soon as they were alone, "dat man Crump an' Berry am heah."

"Eh! What's that?"

"Dat man Crump am heah wid dat man Berry. I seed 'em gwine to de stable, suah," repeated Jack, as quickly as possible.

Bill gave a hurried glance around and whispered to the black:

"We have stumbled on their place; keep your eyes open and be near me all the time. We must play our cards well, or we'll be wiped out."

Just then Crossman returned and engaged in pleasant conversation with our hero.

"I thought I saw four men here as we rode up," remarked Bill.

"So you did," returned Crossman. "They were my hired help and have gone to look after my stock before turning in. We have to be very careful about our stock up here."

Bill knew then that he was in a nest of counterfeiters and horse thieves, and never let any motion of the host escape him.

But everything was perfectly quiet and orderly, and at bed-time the host offered to show Bill to his room.

Jack arose to follow.

Crossman pushed him back.

"My man always sleeps on the floor of the room I occupy," remarked Buffalo Bill, as he saw the motion to keep back the faithful Jack.

"Oh, yes, that's all right," said Crossman. "I didn't know."

And Jack quietly followed them into the room assigned the young leader of the Deadshots.

"Jack," said Buffalo Bill, Jr., when they were left alone, "we are in the tightest place we ever struck yet, and have got to keep our eyes skinned. To sleep would be certain death. There are two windows in this room. You keep watch at that one, and I'll stand at this one. No, you go to sleep and I'll watch till two o'clock, when I will wake you up for a turn myself."

"Dat amn't de right way, Marse Bill," said Jack. "I'll keep dis winder, or know why, dat's a fac'," and the faithful black stationed himself at the window assigned him by Buffalo Bill.

They were not three minutes in the room ere Bill put out the light, and the watch commenced.

Ten minutes later Bill saw Crossman stealthily leave the house and run rapidly toward the stable.

"There he goes," muttered Buffalo Bill. "Come, Jack, let's get outside and hide near the stable and see what they are up to. We may lose our horses if we stay here."

Bill raised the window and leaped to the ground.

Jack followed, lowering the window so as not to excite suspicion, and then followed Buffalo Bill to the woods just beyond the house, where, under the cover of the bushes, they could watch the premises from the stable to the house.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ADVENTURES OF A NIGHT.

By the time Buffalo Bill and Philosopher Jack became well settled in the bushes, the full, round moon began to peep over the hills, casting long, slanting rays of silvery light across the ranch, enabling them to see everything that was going on about the place.

But for a time everything seemed to be wrapped in solitude. Not a sound of any kind was heard—nothing stirring.

The four men were in the stable consulting over the situation, and waiting for the young leader and his black follower to go to sleep.

Suddenly Bill saw a man come out of the stable and creep softly towards the house, stepping as lightly as a cat on the watch for a mouse.

Halting under one of the windows of the room which our hero had just vacated, the man waited in the attitude of a listener, at times placing an ear against the wall of the house and holding it there for several moments.

"I hope he hears something," muttered Jack, in a whisper.

"Keep quiet," said Bill, laying a hand upon Jack's shoulder. "They want to find out whether we are asleep or not."

"Oh, we's sound er sleep."

"I hope they will think so."

And Bill again made a motion for silence with his right hand, and Jack closed up like a clam.

The man went back to the stable, and another long weary hour passed, during which Bill and Jack kept up the watch unflaggingly.

At the end of that time the man went to the house and listened as before.

He made a motion toward the stable with his hand, and a moment later the other three came towards him, stepping softly as so many cats.

They assembled at the corner before the two windows, in the clear, silvery light of the full moon, and held a whispered consultation.

A minute later they all four removed their boots and proceeded to the back door of the house, a revolver in one hand and a Bowie knife in the other.

"Now, Jack," whispered Buffalo Bill to his black comrade, "let's go to the stable and get our horses while they are looking for us in that room."

"Yes, sah. Dat am de ting," assented Jack. "I knows whar dey is," and the black led the way toward the stable, keeping in the shadow of the woods till they had the stable between them and the house.

When they were thus sure of not being discovered they ran into the stable.

Jack knew where the horses were; Bill felt around for the saddles and soon found them.

To put them on the horses and lead them out into the woods was the work of but a few minutes.

"Now let's go and watch the house again," whispered young Buffalo Bill, and, followed by faithful Jack, went back to the spot where they had kept watch on the ranch.

"They are slow and cautious," muttered Bill, as a half hour passed without anything being heard from them.

"Dey is mighty scary, dat's a fac'," muttered Jack.

"Hush! Listen!"

A few sulphurous oaths were borne on the night air through the open windows, and a moment later Crossman and Berry appeared at the window and gazed out toward the bushes.

Their voices could be heard very plainly now.

"They have skipped," said one, with a bitter oath.

"They must have suspected something."

"That negro must have recognized us," said another, "and gave it away to the young daredevil."

"Well, they ain't far off," said old Silas Taggart. "They'll want their horses and won't go back without 'em. We must keep a watch on the stable."

"Yes, that's the game," and then they left the window to appear a moment later at the back door, where they quickly put on their boots and started for the stable.

Taggart went inside to see if everything was all right.

"Gone!" yelled Taggart, as he reappeared at the door a minute later. "Both horses are gone!"

"The deuce!" gasped a voice, which young Buffalo Bill instantly recognized as Crump's.

"Euchred!" exclaimed Berry.

"They were here when we went to the house," said Taggart, "and can't be far off now. They won't go any other way but by the road; let's go down by the hollow and plug 'em as they go by."

"Good—come!" said Crossman. "We can get them without running any risk that way," and the four men started on a run in the direction of the hollow through which the only road in that part of the country ran. It was a dark, gloomy place, well adapted for a cowardly murder such as the four villains contemplated committing.

"He-he-he!" chuckled Jack, "dey wants us bad. But dem's de kind of chickens what comes home ter roost sometimes."

"Yes, you are right, Jack," said Buffalo Bill. "They have cut us off at the hollow. But I am disposed to wait till daylight and give them a taste of our lead."

"Dey don't lub it, Massa Bill, but I reckon as how we can make 'em eat some ob it."

To the astonishment of Bill, however, some ten minutes after the four villains had started for the hollow, a party of horsemen, leading five loose horses, rode up to the house and dismounted, one of the party calling out in a loud voice:

"Halloo, Taggart!"

Of course there was no one in the house to respond to the hail.

After a lapse of a minute or two the man hailed again:

"Halloo, Taggart!"

Out of patience, the man entered the gate and walked up to the piazza and pounded on the door.

"More thieves with more horses," whispered Buffalo Bill, as he watched the actions of the men.

"Confound it, are you all dead drunk in there?" yelled the man, applying his heavy boot to the door with resounding effect.

"Halloo, there!" cried Taggart, who had returned on hearing the calls of the newcomers. "Just let that ere house stand where it is, will you?"

"Where the d—l have you been at this time of night?" queried one of the party at the gate as the old stableman came up.

"Been a hunting," was the gruff reply.

"Hunting, the devil!" growled one of the gang.

"Yes, you'd think it was the devil, if he got after you."

"Well, take those horses and give 'em a new suit before morning, or we may have trouble about 'em."

Old Taggart went up to the party at the gate and took charge of the five loose horses, first blowing a shrill whistle, a signal to Crump, Crossman and Berry down in the hollow.

He then led the horses in a direction that did not look as though he was going to the stable with them.

"Wait here, Jack," whispered Buffalo Bill to the black, "and I'll see where he takes those horses."

And pushing through the bushes parallel to the route taken by Taggart, Bill followed him down to a ravine that ran through the lower corner of the ranch.

On the further side of this ravine the rugged hills arose almost abruptly, forming in some places precipices nearly a hundred feet high.

Taggart turned up this ravine a little distance, parted a clump of bushes, and led the horses into a cavern, the mouth of which yawned like a great black crevice in the face of the precipice.

Dark as it was, Taggart led the horses inside as though every crag and boulder was familiar as an open plain to him.

"Ah! This is the most important discovery of all!" muttered Young Buffalo Bill. "These are the headquarters of all the horse thieves and counterfeiters in the country. They are so cautious they won't have a woman on the place. They keep the stolen horses there until they can dispose of them, which is why they are never found out."

After getting the exact location of the cave Young Buffalo Bill hastened back to where Jack watched the premises.

The new-comers were in the house drinking each a glass of whisky, which Crossman's jug yielded them.

Crump was telling them of the events of night, of the presence of Young Buffalo Bill and Philosopher Jack in their immediate vicinity at that moment.

"There are eleven of us," he said. "We can catch and crush 'em under our heels. Let's scour the woods around the ranch, and rout 'em out if they are still here."

"Yes, that's it! Kill 'em if we catch 'em!" and the entire party filed out of the house with cocked revolvers in their hands.

CHAPTER VIII.

BUFFALO BILL'S LONG SHOT.

"Now we must get back further toward the hills, Jack," whispered Buffalo Bill, as he saw the gang approaching. "You get the horses and I'll look after these fellows. Take the horses towards the hill on the side of the road, and keep them out of range."

Jack was quick to obey, and glided through the bushes as softly as a panther.

Young Buffalo Bill fell back through the woods, giving a signal whistle of warning to Black Jack.

"That's them," said Crump, eagerly, as he heard the signal. "They are right ahead in the bushes! Make a rush for the road and you will see them."

They did make a rush, and came very near running over Young Buffalo Bill, who, not expecting such a programme, had to step in a thick clump of bushes as they swept past him.

But Jack had the horses away upon the hillside, and signaled back to his leader.

"They're up on the hill!" exclaimed Crump.

Just then Buffalo Bill signaled to Jack from his place in the bushes.

"Why, d—n it!" exclaimed Crossman, "there's one of 'em back there at the house. What are they playing us, anyhow?"

"There! Look there!" whispered Berry to one of the men in the wood, not twenty paces away from where the young leader of the Deadshots stood. "There's one of 'em on that ledge on the hillside there—don't you see him in the moonlight?"

"Yes, and it must be the nigger. Let me have a shot at him!"

"You can't hit him at that distance!"

"Yes, I can. It isn't over two hundred yards," and the man raised his rifle to his shoulder, took deliberate aim and fired.

The keen crack of the rifle broke upon the still night air, and awoke a thousand echoes among the hills.

But scarcely had the last echo died away ere another shot rang out from the hillside, and one of the villains in the road threw up his arms, shrieked, and staggering forward a few paces, fell dead at the feet of Berry and Crump.

"Get under cover—quick!" hissed Crump. "Those devils never miss when they shoot!" and the entire party broke for the cover of the bushes.

Jack gave another signal to Buffalo Bill, but the latter was so close to Crump and his party that he dared not answer it at the time.

"They are separated," said Crump, loud enough for Buffalo Bill to hear, "and are signaling for one another. Let's make a dash for that nigger up there, clean him out, and then keep up the hunt for the head devil."

"Well, that's the best plan. Come on—push straight ahead for him. He can't load and fire fast enough to keep out of our way," and the party sprang forward through the bushes.

But the moment after they started Buffalo Bill gave a shrill whistle that warned the black of his danger, while at the same time it alarmed the horse thieves.

Buffalo Bill regained the road and ran down toward the ravine, turned square to the right, and then made his way up the steep hillside toward Philosopher Jack, giving signals as he went.

He found Jack kneeling behind a boulder watching the rush of the robbers below in the bushes.

"You laid one of 'em out, Jack," he said, as he took his place alongside of the black.

"Dat's what I went for ter do," muttered Jack. "Dar dey is! Let 'em hab it, Massa Bill!"

There was a small place below that where the bushes were not very thick, and the thieves could plainly be seen as they ran across toward the foot of the hill.

Buffalo Bill knew that if they gained the hill they could pour in a fire that would be too hot for himself and Jack, so he raised his repeating rifle to his shoulder, took a quick aim and fired.

Another man staggered back in the bushes and fell in the agonies of death; but the desperate Crump and his men pushed on with fierce determination, and got so close under the hill that neither party could see the other.

"Now, let's slip around, and get down into

the road again," whispered Buffalo Bill to Jack, and the jolly black agreed.

If Bill had suggested that they jump down on their assailants the philosophical darky would have been willing.

"Where are the horses?"

"Dis way," replied Jack, leading the way at a tangent, with Buffalo Bill at his heels.

They regained the road with their horses just as the desperadoes gained the bowlder whence they had seen the two fatal shots fired.

But seeing nothing of the two men they were in search of, the desperadoes were confused and puzzled to know what to do. They did not know that they were exposing themselves to an enemy in their rear, until two shots rang out from the woods below, and two of their number went rolling and tumbling down the hillside they had just climbed.

"So perish all horse thieves and counterfeits!" cried Buffalo Bill, in a loud voice, and instantly the whole party made a dive for the bowlder behind which they could find shelter from the unerring bullets of the Deadshots.

Nothing could be seen of them for over an hour. They dared not show themselves, and Buffalo Bill and Philosopher Jack began to grow weary of the watch.

"Dis amn't no fun fo' me," said black Jack, getting impatient at the long delay.

"But daylight is coming," said young Bill, "when we can have 'em where we want 'em."

As the gray dawn began to make things clearer to their view, the young leader of the Deadshots saw that he had the desperadoes in a tight place.

Having a long range repeating rifle, he wended his way to another hilltop a half mile distant, and stationed himself on a point in full view of the desperadoes.

"We are out of range of their rifles now, Jack, and yet have them in range of ours. Just let 'em try to come out now if they dare."

"Dere's one ob 'em!" cried Jack, pointing to the ledge on the hillside where he had fired the fatal shot the night before.

Buffalo Bill looked, and saw a man standing on top of the bowlder in full view, looking in his direction.

"Now see him take a tumble," he said, raising his rifle to his shoulder, and taking a quick aim, fired.

"Golly, but dat got him," yelled Jack dancing up and down like a jumping-jack as the man staggered and fell backwards from the bowlder.

"That was a long shot, Jack."

"Yes, sah; but it fatched 'im."

"Look out!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, on seeing four or five puffs of white smoke issue from the side of the bowlder, followed a second later by as many reports.

But their bullets did not reach our heroes, as they did not even hear them strike anywhere.

"Just let 'em show their heads again," said Eaton, "and I'll give them another sample of our skill with the rifle."

But the desperadoes did not show themselves. They well knew the danger, and the advantage of young Buffalo Bill's position. They could neither go up nor down the hillside without exposing themselves to his fatal fire.

CHAPTER IX.

TURNING THE TABLES.

"I RATHER think we have them in a tight place, Jack," remarked Buffalo Bill, after waiting another hour for a sight of one of the desperadoes.

"Yes, sah; but dey is got us in the same fix," replied Jack.

"How so?" Bill asked, in no little surprise.

"Kase ef we goes for ter git some brekfuss dey'll come down arter us."

"Oh, you're there, are you?" and Buffalo Bill laughed heartily. "Your belly is grumbling for grub, eh?"

"Yes, sah; dis belly allus knows when brekfuss is ready," replied Jack, with refreshing frankness.

"Can't you persuade your belly to wait till we starve those fellows out over there?"

"No, sah!" was the emphatic reply. "Dey kin starve us out."

"How can they? We can do without food as long as they can."

"Dey's got er dead man which dey can eat," replied Jack, shaking his head, at which Bill laughed heartily.

"You let your belly rule you too much, Jack, my boy."

"De belly got more sense dan de head when grub is wanted," said Jack. "De belly mus' hab de grub."

"Well, you go down to the house and get something to eat for both of us," said Jack's leader, "and I'll keep those fellows off till you come back."

Jack needed no second urging, for he bounded off down the hill as fast as his heels could carry him, leaving his rifle behind.

He reached the house and made his way to the kitchen, where he found meat and flour in abundance. To make a fire and cook bread and meat was quick work for him, for he well understood how to do it.

He then searched the house till he found Crossman's jug of whisky, at which he took a strong pull, and confiscated it.

And not forgetful of his horse, he went to the stable and procured corn in a bag, which he threw over his shoulder, put the breakfast for Buffalo Bill, Jr., in a bucket, and started back to where the gallant young leader was keeping guard over his prisoners, half a mile away.

Buffalo Bill was agreeably surprised when Jack returned with a good hot breakfast of bread and ham, as well as the corn for the horse.

"You stand guard while I eat," he said, giving his gun to Jack and proceeding to make an onslaught on the meat and bread.

Jack stood patiently for a half hour or so, watching the hill where the desperadoes were concealed.

Suddenly he was startled by a rifle shot from the foot of the hill on which he was standing, and the same instant he felt a sting on the side of his head as though a hornet had dropped on him.

"What the devil was that?" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, springing to his feet in an instant.

Jack had dropped down flat on the ground, and was rubbing his head vigorously.

"Dey hab done gone an' shot my head off!" he exclaimed, as he pulled out patches of kinky hair the bullet had cut from his head.

Bang—bang! came two more shots, and two bullets passed through Buffalo Bill's hat.

Down he fell, flat on the ground.

"Hanged if they haven't given us the slip!" he muttered to Jack, "and if we don't keep flat they'll settle our accounts for us."

"Dey is done gone an' settled me, Marse Bill," groaned Jack, still rubbing his head where the bullet had grazed so closely as to raise a bump as big as a walnut.

"Well, don't be troubled, Jack. I'll see the wolves don't eat you," and with that he commenced crawling forward to get a glimpse down the hill to see if the desperadoes were in sight.

There they were, five in number, coming up the hill, believing they had killed Buffalo Bill and wounded Jack.

"Here they come, Jack—get your gun on them."

Jack wheeled over on his belly, seized his rifle and crawled forward to the side of Buffalo Bill.

But the desperadoes caught the sight of Jack's rifle pointing in their direction, and in an instant each man sprang behind a tree.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Bill, loud enough for them to hear. "Why don't you come up and get our scalps?"

"Surrender," cried Crump, "or you are dead men!"

"All right," replied Buffalo Bill, "come up and take us. We are just whipped to death."

"Dat's a fac', suah," added Jack.

"What kind of treatment will you give us?" Buffalo Bill asked.

"Oh, we'll let you go," was the reply.

"Well, why not let us go without any trouble of surrender?"

"We want to talk to you some."

"I guess you do. You'd rather talk than fight."

"We have sent for reinforcements which will be here before night, when we will not give you any chance at all."

"That's just the time my band of Deadshots will be here," replied Buffalo Bill, trying the old game of bluff. "We'll have some fun then."

That made the desperadoes sick.

They had seen what two of the band could do, as half their number were either dead or wounded. What could they do against the whole band?

Suddenly a rapid advance of several horses was heard.

"Here they are!" cried one of the desperadoes, as a dozen mounted men rode by on their way to the ranch, and then they were hailed by those behind the trees.

"By George, Jack, we'll have to cut for it!" cried Buffalo Bill, as the horsemen rushed up the hillside in response to Crump and Crossman's call.

"Dey's got our hosses!" exclaimed Jack, in dismay.

"We'll have to foot it over the hills—come," and Jack turned and followed his daring leader in the desperate effort to escape from a band of sixteen desperadoes resolved on having their lives at all hazards.

As they sprang away, turning the brow of the hill, the desperadoes gave a shout and sent a shower of bullets after them, which whistled so close around their heads as to make them feel very uncomfortable.

But the next moment they were over the brow of the hill, going down on the other side as fast as their heels could carry them.

Those who were mounted spurred their horses to the top of the hill and stopped to take deliberate aim at the flying Deadshots.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEATH OF THE BLOODHOUNDS.

BUFFALO BILL and Philosopher Jack ran down the hillside, pursued by sixteen desperadoes with Crump and Berry at their head.

As the mounted desperadoes reached the top of the hill they saw that to ride down that rugged, rocky hillside as fast as the pursued were going would be exceedingly dangerous to both horse and rider.

They therefore halted and leveled their guns at them.

Just as they pulled the triggers Buffalo Bill and the faithful black stumbled and fell headlong over a ledge of rock, disappearing entirely from sight.

The desperadoes actually believed they had killed them and set up a yell of triumph.

"Ugh!" grunted Jack, as he fell heavily to the ground, "Ise broke dat breckfuss all ter pieces, Marse Bill."

"Save the pieces, Jack!" said Bill. "Come, let's get away from here. They are getting too many for us."

They both sprang up, dashed off to the left, under the protection of the ledge of rocks, gained the woods again unperceived, and made good haste to get out of sight of the gang.

They made their way into the depths of the forest, resolved to give the desperadoes no more trouble until they could get their band together and besiege the ranch.

Ere they had gone a quarter of a mile they could hear the execrations of the disappointed desperadoes, enraged beyond measure at their final escape from their clutches.

"They know we can't be very far away, Jack," said Buffalo Bill, after a short stop to listen, "and will not give up until they lose hope of catching us. We must get back to the band. We can do nothing more to-day."

"Dat's a fac'," assented Jack, "but hit's a long walk, Marse Bill."

"Yes, but we can walk it very easily."

"Yes, sah, ef dey lefs us be," and then they resumed their tramp through the woods, making a circuit to regain the road some two or three miles below the ranch.

They trudged along some two or three hours, Jack making many amusing philosophical remarks on the situation, when they came to a small stream that indicated the presence of a spring not far away.

This they concluded to reach, take a rest there, and then pursue their way southward toward Cheyenne.

On finding the spring they sat down to rest.

But they had not been seated more than ten minutes ere they were startled by the deep baying of bloodhounds in the woods whence they had just come.

"Great God!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, "they have put bloodhounds on our trail!"

"Yes, sah, dem's bloodhoun's. I know dere talk."

"Well, it's no use running from them," said Bill, the light of battle gleaming in his eyes. "We must wait till the hounds come, kill them, and then dodge 'em again."

"Dey is a-comin'!" exclaimed Jack, as the

deep-toned voices of the bloodhounds grew more distinct.

"Get behind that tree. I'll take this one. Shoot the first hound or man that comes in sight."

Jack took the position assigned him, and the young leader did the same.

Five minutes they stood there, listening to the deep baying of the hounds, until at last the bloodthirsty beasts came in sight, jaws distended and eyes bloodshot.

Two keen, sharp reports rang out and two of them fell dead in their tracks.

The deadshots never missed their aim.

Two more shots and two more dead bloodhounds.

Only one more remained.

"Leave him to me," cried Buffalo Bill, in calm, steady tones.

"Dar he is—fetch him!"

He fired, and the last of the pack rolled over in the agonies of death.

"Now we can go ahead," said young Buffalo Bill, shouldering his rifle and starting off on a trot followed by Jack.

Soon they heard their pursuers behind them, swearing like pirates at the death of the bloodhounds.

"Take to the road!" cried Crump, in a loud tone of voice. "They will make for Cheyenne. We can get ahead and intercept them."

The entire party then made for the road, a quarter of a mile on their left, which they soon gained. They then dashed on at full speed towards Cheyenne.

"Ah! I understand that game, my fine fellows," said Buffalo Bill, as he saw them dashing down the road; "you think to intercept us, but we'll fool you yet."

The two hunted men then pursued their way unmolested till the sun went down, which found them still ten miles away from Cheyenne.

"Now we must keep away from the road, Jack. They are watching for us there. We want to get the band out and call to see 'em again."

"Yes, sah, but I wants ter git some sleep in first," said Jack, who was beginning to feel the want of sleep.

"Well, just hold up till we get home and we'll be all right."

They toiled along till they came to the house of one of the band.

They astounded him by their appearance and the story of their terrible struggle with the desperadoes.

"Mount your horse, Bob," said young Buffalo Bill, "and call in the band at daylight. Have them meet here, and we will give them a taste of what the Deadshots can do."

Bob White mounted his horse and dashed away to call out the band at daylight—to meet their leader at Bob's house.

Bill and Jack, overcome with fatigue and loss of sleep, remained at White's, going to sleep as soon as they laid down.

It was clear daylight when they awoke, and the entire band were there waiting for the orders of their leader.

Bob had provided horses for Buffalo Bill and Philosopher Jack.

"De fun am er comin'," said Jack, as he saw the young men. "De year of juberlee am er comin', whoop!" and he executed a Highland fling in the presence of the band, that elicited their hearty applause.

"Better be saying your prayers, Jack," said Burt Edwards, "you may be killed to-day."

"Prayin' don't do me no good," said Jack. "I'd er bin dead now ef I hed stopped for ter pray. No, sah, de Lor' helps dem as helps dereselves, dat's a fac'."

After a hearty breakfast they all mounted and dashed away, Buffalo Bill, Jr., at their head, making straight for Crossman's ranch.

The horses being fresh they made good time, and nothing was allowed to turn them aside from their object.

By noon they came in sight of the ranch a mile distant, from which point everything seemed quiet and peaceful, as though it had not been the scene of a bloody fight the day before.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DEADSHOTS AT WORK.

As they neared the house, they concluded to send one forward and wait for his report.

Bob White volunteered to go, and the rest

of the band waited in the woods till he returned.

When Bob knocked at the door of the house he heard no response.

He then hallooed at the top of his voice without arousing any one. Then he went around to the kitchen and made a big racket, pounding on the door with his heavy boot-heels.

Still no response from anybody.

The stable was next visited, but not a horse was there, chickens about the barn-yard being the only live things to be found on the premises.

"Skedaddled, or I'm a sinner!" muttered Bob, going back to his comrades.

"Nobody there," he reported to young Buffalo Bill, on his return. "Everything is as quiet as a graveyard."

"Reckon as how you'll find a graveyard some's 'bout hyer ef yer looks for 'em," remarked Philosopher Jack, "kase we started one for 'em—dat's a fac', suah."

"Maybe they have all taken to the cave," said Buffalo Bill, looking around at his men, "and mean to make a stay there."

"Smoke 'em out," said Ben Nagle.

"Starve 'em," suggested another.

"Let's see if they are there, first," said the young leader, starting off in the direction of the cave.

The entire band followed him down to the ravine, turned and marched along that till they arrived at the mouth of the cavern.

"There it is," said he, pointing to the fissure in the rock, in front of which grew a clump of bushes that would have concealed it from a casual passer-by.

"Let's go in," said Ben, in his impulsive way.

"No, get torches first," was Buffalo Bill's order, and the whole party went in search of pine splints to make torches of.

Being versed in such things, Philosopher Jack went at once for the barn, where he found a quantity of lumber, planks of various widths and lengths. One of these planks he found to be dry and resinous. He got an ax, cut it up and made torches for the party while they were looking elsewhere for torches.

Each man took a torch, lighted it, and boldly followed their leader into the cave, revolver in hand, ready for a struggle to the death with the desperadoes.

Bill boldly led the way in, going a considerable distance over a smooth, hard earth floor, without seeing or hearing anything of an enemy.

Neither man nor horse could be found; but signs of recent occupancy by a number of horses were found all around them.

"Vamosed!" exclaimed Cyrus Cammack.

"Yes, skedaddled!" said Bob White, as they all stopped and looked at each other.

"They wouldn't wait for us," remarked Burt Edwards.

"Well, we can take possession, can't we?" Tom Travers asked.

"What good will that do?" Ralph Homer asked. "We have no proof against them, other than what Buffalo Bill and Jack saw, and they can't swear the horses they saw were stolen."

"That's so," added Buffalo Bill. "They have taken the precaution to remove the stock to some other place. They have another secret hiding-place somewhere among the hills."

"What shall we do now?" Joe Bledsoe asked.

"Go to the house and cook a few of those chickens for dinner," suggested Ransie Wright.

"Yes, chickens—chickens!" chorused the party.

"Cock-a-doo—doo!" crowed Jack, with such precision that the whole band burst into a hearty laugh as they filed out into the open air.

To the house they went, where they made themselves at home until two of their number got up a good dinner. Then they sat down and satisfied their hunger.

After dinner they called a council of war to decide upon the next move. The result was a resolution to picnic on the place till the next day.

"Some of them may return," said young Buffalo Bill, "which may give us the chance to get some information as to where their other hiding-place is."

That decided them, and then they divided up into parties of twos and threes, and explored every part of the ranch. In the cave

a party found a stable complete with every convenience except light. There was even a small stream of almost ice-cold water in a corner, where they had cut a basin in the rock to hold enough for all their needs.

"This is as fine a place for brigands," said Ben Nagle, "as can be found on the continent. But these hills all the way north of Cheyenne are full of such caves. We can have some fun hunting and smoking 'em out."

Night came on and another big chicken fry was indulged in, after which Buffalo Bill, Jr., put a guard of two men at the stable, and two near the house, who were to be relieved at midnight.

"Some of them who have not heard the news may come in with stock," said the young leader, "so keep a good watch and keep yourselves hid as much as possible."

Nothing occurred until near daylight, when a party of nine men rode up and dismounted at the gate.

The guard instantly gave a signal that woke up the light sleepers in the house, who sprang up and took nothing but their arms—dress was ignored for the time.

The moon was shining brightly, by means of which the young Deadshots could see the movements of the party.

"There's Crump!" whispered Nagle, as the party entered the gate and started toward the house, while two of their number went toward the stable with the horses.

"There's Berry, too!" said young Buffalo Bill; "keep cool. Wait till they open the door and then be quick to follow orders."

The desperadoes came up on the steps of the piazza, and Crossman took a key from his pocket and inserted it in the lock.

"Guess they haven't been here yet," remarked Crossman to Crump.

"Where could they have gone, then? Not one of 'em was at home last night."

"Out on some devilish excursion," replied the ranchman, as he turned the key in the lock and pushed the door wide open.

"We are all here," said Buffalo Bill, Jr., in firm tones, presenting a cocked revolver at Crossman's breast, "ready to blow you to kingdom come if you move a hand!"

"Buffalo Bill!" gasped Crump, springing back among the others, leaving Crossman to face the black muzzled revolver alone.

CHAPTER XII.

JUDGE LYNCH'S COURT—"GUILTY."

"THE way of the transgressor is hard, Crossman," remarked Buffalo Bill, as he stood facing the ranchman while the others of the band surrounded the desperadoes who had come up with him.

"What are you doing here?" Crossman asked, after a pause.

"Do you surrender?"

"To whom?"

"To me—Bill Eaton," with a tone that made the ranchman tremble.

"Why should I surrender?"

"Oh, you needn't do so unless you think it best," remarked Bill. "I think we can take care of you. Jack, tie him up strong and fast. If he resists you can drag his carcass out into the yard. He won't need any door plate on his coffin."

"Hole out dem stealers, heah!" said Jack, advancing on the ranchman.

"Hold on," said Crossman, stepping back a pace or two. "By what authority do you arrest me?"

"By authority from Judge Lynch," replied the young leader, "and for robbing me of my horse yesterday morning."

"I have had nothing to do with your horse."

"Tie him up, Jack."

Jack seized him, and as he made no resistance soon had him tied hard and fast.

"Now tie up Crump there!"

Jack looked for Crump, but neither he nor Berry were to be seen among the prisoners.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, Jr., "has he given us the slip? How did he do it?"

"Jes' flewed away, I reckon, like de ghostses do," remarked Jack.

"Well, tie up the others," and in a few minutes they were all—five in number—securely tied.

Just as the last man was bound, the two guards from the stable marched the two desperadoes in who had carried the horses to the stable.

"Two men and nine horses, sir," said Ranse Wright, reporting to Bill.

"Two men escaped—we have seven, though. Tie them up, too."

And Jack, who could tie a knot equal to a sailor, soon had them bound in the bonds of hemp.

By this time daylight was pretty well at hand, and Jack began to slaughter chickens as they came from the roost. There was plenty of ham in the larder, but they all hankered after chickens, and chickens, fat and tender, were to be had in abundance.

After breakfast Bill organized a court, and himself presided as Judge Lynch.

"Crossman, you are to be tried in this court for robbing me of my horse."

"You have no right to try me," said Crossman.

"Oh, look here now," replied Bill, "if you have any defense to make you had better make it instead of objecting to the jurisdiction of this court. We don't claim any legal right under the laws of the land, but we'll try you, nevertheless, and hang you, if found guilty, all the same. So make your defense. You have the benefit of being considered innocent until proven guilty."

Crossman was pale as death.

The thing began to look serious for him.

"Is it fair for you to preside?" he asked, "at a trial where you are interested?"

"Why, bless my soul! What a lawyer you are!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, Jr. "That was neatly done; I'll step down and let some one else preside—there, that big fellow over there, one of your own men. We'll let him preside, and act as Judge Lynch. Will you act as judge, sir?"

The big fellow was as much astonished as Crossman himself.

"Bress de Lor' of my soul!" exclaimed Philosopher Jack. "Why, he'll hang all of us, suah!"

"No, I'll take the chances of that," said the young leader, when the laugh had subsided.

Crossman begged him to accept, and the big desperado, Benson by name, got up, had his bonds cut, and walked forward to the seat which young Buffalo Bill, Jr., had just vacated.

"Hold up your right hand and take the oath."

The man held up his hand and repeated after Bill:

"I solemnly swear to hear the evidence in this case and render judgment in accordance therewith, the penalty of death or acquittal being the only decisions allowed in this court; I also swear to render an impartial verdict on pain of death for failure to do so."

"Now we can go on with the trial," said Eaton. "The court is regularly organized and ready for business."

Crossman's face had brightened up when Benson took the judge's seat; but it fell again when he heard the terrible oath that was administered to him. He knew that Benson would be careful not to jeopardize his own neck by any decision in his favor unless the evidence leaned strongly that way.

Buffalo Bill and Philosopher Jack then gave their evidence as to being robbed of their horses. They not only lost their horses, but came near losing their lives, as the defendant and his comrades, who were still at large, entered their room with drawn bowies for the purpose of murdering them in their sleep.

"Did you see me do that?" Crossman asked.

"I did!" was the emphatic reply of Buffalo Bill, Jr.

"Did you see me take your horse?"

"I did not. I saw you in the attacking party. I had to run to save my life."

"And left your horse behind?"

"Yes—I couldn't get to my horse. It would have been death to me to attempt it."

"You didn't see anybody take your horse, then?"

"No."

"Then how can you swear that I took your horse?"

"Because you were present when I left my horse on your premises. I was driven away by force of arms, and my property taken by you and others."

"I have no witnesses, judge," said Crossman, "and therefore must rely on the fact that I am innocent until found guilty. Neither of them say they saw me take the horse, and therefore I am not to be condemned on suspicion."

"See here," said Bill, "I will ask you a few

questions. If you lie, I will pistol you on the spot. Were you not with the party who shot at us and chased us away from your ranch?"

"Yes," hesitatingly.

"Didn't you shoot at us?"

Silence.

"Tell the truth, for if you tell a lie where I know the truth, I will shoot you down for a perjurer!"

"It is not fair to make a man condemn himself," faltered Crossman.

"You will not condemn yourself. Truth alone will do that. Did you shoot at us?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Because a fight was going on, and we were all mixed up in it."

"Very well. Now what became of our horses?"

Crossman turned pale.

"What became of our horses?"

"They were taken to the stable."

"Whose stable?"

"Mine."

"With your consent?"

"Yes."

"Exactly. Now, don't you harbor horse-thieves and stolen horses?"

"That's got nothing to do with—"

"Stop! answer my question!" thundered Buffalo Bill, Jr., raising his revolver and cocking it; "you can simply say yes, or no, but an answer I will have!"

"I—suppose—I have, but—"

"That will do. Now, do you know where my horse is?"

"No."

"Who took him away from your stable?"

"Some of the men did it. I don't know where they took him."

"But he was taken away with your consent?"

"Y—yes."

"Very well. Now, judge, you have heard the evidence on both sides of this case. Is he guilty or not guilty?"

Every member of the band of Deadshots rose and leveled their rifles at the judge of this strange court.

"We are ready for the verdict," said Buffalo Bill, Jr.

"GUILTY!" gasped the judge, cowering before the black-muzzled rifles.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DEADSHOTS ENTER THE FIELD.

As Benson pronounced the word "guilty," his face turned deathly white—whiter than Crossman's—and he turned his eyes away from the prisoner.

"That's the right kind of verdict," said Buffalo Bill, Jr., "and is in accordance with the evidence."

"Traitor!" hissed Crossman, as Benson left the seat in which he had presided as judge, "you will meet the same justice some day for this!"

"What would you have me do?" Benson groaned—"what would you have done in the face of those rifles?"

"He would have done as you did," said Burt Edwards, who was standing by at the time.

"You are just as guilty as I am!" cried Crossman, growing more excited every minute.

"Has he ever stolen any horses?" Buffalo Bill asked.

"Yes; I never stole one in my life; I only gave them shelter and board for a share in the profits."

"The whole gang are horse thieves, then, are they?"

Crossman was about to answer the question when Benson, who was standing near Burt Edwards, suddenly snatched a revolver from Burt's belt, and fired full in Crossman's face.

"Now squeal, will you?" coolly remarked the murderer, as his victim threw up his hands, clutched wildly at space, reeled backward, spun clean around two or three times, and then fell heavily to the floor, a dead man, shot through the brain!

"That was a cowardly murder!" hissed Burt Edwards, dealing Benson a powerful blow on the ear with his fist, which sent him reeling half way across the room.

Before Benson could recover from the blow the revolver was wrenched from his hands, and then he was tied again.

"I guess we shall have to have another session of the court," remarked Nagle. "That was a plain case of murder."

"No, sir," said Benson. "It was purely a case of self-defense."

"I believe you there, sir," Buffalo Bill, Jr. remarked. "I don't blame you. I probably would have done the same thing under similar circumstances. He would have said enough to hang every one of you had you not killed him. You are all horse thieves. I am sure of that, and if I can get any proof of it I would hang the whole batch of you. But I can bring no witnesses against you now. You are all free to go where you please. But remember, that under circumstances like these again, you will hang higher than this roof. Jack, cut those bonds and let them go."

"I'd a heap rader cut dere froats," growled Jack, in no wise please with the release of the prisoners.

"Now you can plant your comrade there and then go."

They took up the body of Crossman and carried it out into the woods, where they dug a shallow grave and buried it.

Then they mounted their horses and rode away, both sadder and wiser but in no wise better men, for they went away swearing to get even with the young leader of the Deadshots even if it cost the lives of all of them.

"Now, boys," said Buffalo Bill, Jr., to his men, "we have cleaned out this ranch, though the two men we most wanted have escaped us. Jack's horse and mine are both gone, but we can't help it. I have another one, but Jack will have to go afoot unless we club together and buy him one."

"Dat's a fac'," said Jack, "an' my two-legged hoss ain't no good, needer."

The Deadshots all laughed and at once arranged to buy the horse which had been borrowed for his use on this trip.

The band then prepared to leave the ranch, and in another half hour were on their way back to their homes below Cheyenne.

When they reached their homes they were astonished at hearing that a band of nine masked men had visited each house, asking for the one whose name was on the list of Deadshots.

None of them were at home, of course, and the families were very much alarmed for their safety.

They immediately came together again to consult over the matter.

"It was an attempt of Crump's to take us in detail and wipe us out," said Buffalo Bill, Jr., "and had we been at home it would in all probability have succeeded. Now what shall we do to prevent such a calamity?"

"Suppose we keep the field till we clean out the rascals," said Burt Edwards.

"That is a good idea, and I for one am willing to do so," remarked Young Buffalo Bill. "We can kill buffalo enough in the season to pay our expenses or more. All in favor of that programme will please say 'I.'"

"I!" burst from the whole band.

"De stay-at-homes ain't got no show in dis crowd," remarked Philosopher Jack, as he cut a chew of tobacco with his eye teeth. "De chile who'd stay home an' be tuk up an' lynched ain't got no better sense, dat's er fac'."

"I hardly think Crump will attempt to molest us again soon," said the young leader, "as he is now well satisfied to be out of our clutches. But he is a bad man, and we don't know how many men he has in his gang. That there is a band of them stretching clear across the country I am well satisfied. It is our duty to look out for our part of the country and let the others do likewise."

Two or three days were spent in perfecting the plans of the future, the members going home every evening to spend the night.

On the evening of the fourth day, a man dashed up to the farmhouse of old man Eaton and asked for Buffalo Bill, Jr.

"What do you want of him?" the old man asked.

"I have a note from Jim Ruggles for him," was the reply.

"Give it to me."

"Can't do it. Where's Bill?"

"Over at Bert Edwards' place."

The man put spurs to his horse, and dashed away at full speed, reaching Edwards' place in a few minutes, where he found Buffalo Bill and three other members of the band of Deadshots.

"Sim sent it, Bill," he said, as he thrust the note into the young leader's hand.

Bill hastily tore it open, and read the miserable scrawl:

"DEER BILL—Crump an' his men is heer a whisperin' aroun' an' makin' reddy ter go off to-nite on a rade. Look out for him!"

"Yure fren',
"JIM RUGGLES."

"That's all right," he said, folding up the note and putting it in his pocket. "Tell Jim that he is a brick, and that I owe him one. Good-by!"

"Good-by!" and the man rode leisurely back towards Cheyenne, while Buffalo Bill and his other companions mounted their horses, and rode off in as many directions.

But each one stopped at the house of a member of the Deadshots, notifying them to meet promptly at sunset at the cabin of Philosopher Jack, which, by reason of its isolated position, would fail to attract attention.

CHAPTER XIV.

JIM RUGGLES' NOTE—THE LONG CHASE.

THE band met according to appointment, thirteen in all, and were told what news had been received.

"I suspect," said Buffalo Bill, "that they are going to renew their attempt to catch us napping to-night. If so, we will give them such a reception that they will leave the country for a warmer climate."

"Dat's de debil's summer-house!" remarked Jack, "an' it am strange how many folkses go dar. If folkses 'ud be good, dey could all clim' de golden stairs, an'—"

"Oh! o-o-ah!" groaned a half dozen at once.

"What's de matter wid yer?" Jack promptly inquired, looking as though he was greatly surprised.

"Oh, you make us sick!" said Cyrus Cammack.

"Oh, yer's bin er eatin' ob pokeroot pie, honey," said Jack, "dat amn't good for youse," and the laugh was turned on the young fellow for a moment.

"Well, mount," said Buffalo Bill, "and we'll go out by the road and wait for them to come. We'll have it out in the road with them."

They mounted their well-trained horses and rode leisurely out into the main road, up which they trotted briskly for three miles, to a spot where the road widened out into quite a clearing, near a large spring.

"We'll wait for 'em here," remarked Buffalo Bill, dismounting and hitching his horse to a swinging limb.

The band disposed themselves on the ground, playing cards, telling stories, and otherwise amusing themselves in the clear moonlight.

Several farmers living below passed them on their way homeward, some of whom they knew; but they stopped no one, only gazing at them to see if they could recognize them.

Midnight came, and a solitary horseman was heard approaching from toward the town.

They were on the lookout, and soon saw a man pass on horseback, carrying a gun on his shoulder.

No one could recognize him, though he stared at the party in evident surprise as he rode past.

"Who the deuce was that?" Burt Edwards asked of Aleck Heffernan, who was out on the road.

"Hanged if I could make out," was the reply.

Very soon they heard another one coming, but this time it was from below—from the direction of their homes—and in a few minutes a man on horseback, rifle across the pommel of his saddle, rode past them.

"Why, blast my gizzard!" exclaimed Aleck Heffernan, "if that ain't the same chap who went by five minutes ago."

The next instant the stranger put spurs to his horse and fled like the wind, the sound of the horse's hoofs on the hard, clayey soil ringing loud and clear on the night air.

"What the deuce does it mean?" Burt Edwards exclaimed.

"It means that he is one of Crump's gang going back to warn him of our presence here on the road!" cried Buffalo Bill, Jr., springing to his feet and running to his horse. "Mount and pursue 'em! Let's run him down and swing him up!"

"Hurrah for Buffalo Bill!" yelled the Deadshots, springing into the saddle and following their young leader at full speed along the moonlit road.

The roar of a dozen horses in full speed

along a hard road on a still night can be heard a mile away.

The flying stranger was nearly a quarter of a mile in advance, but the pursuing band gained steadily upon him.

At last he met a party of a dozen horsemen in the middle of the road.

"Turn back!" he cried. "The whole band is coming at full speed. They were waiting for us at the spring, but are following me now!"

The party stopped and listened.

They could plainly hear the pursuers coming at full speed.

"Let's ambush them!" cried Berry, the noted desperado; "we can empty nearly every saddle by one fire from the bushes!"

"So we can," assented Crump. "Into the bushes, boys, and let's wipe 'em out and avenge Crossman and Mose Daly!"

"Oh, we can't fight the whole band of Deadshots!" exclaimed one of the men. "We didn't come out for that, we came to catch 'em at home, one by one."

"Oh, come on!" angrily cried Berry. "We can wipe 'em all out at one fire."

"They'll soon be here!" exclaimed Crump, as the sound of the pursuing horsemen grew distressingly loud.

Only four followed the two leaders into the bushes; the others remained undecided in the middle of the road until the head of the pursuing band was seen in the moonlight bounding forward like a pursuing Nemesis.

"There they are!" cried one of the hesitating ones, and the next moment put spurs to his horse and fled like the wind, the others followed at his heels utterly demoralized.

"That settles it!" hissed Crump, through his clenched teeth, "we've got to run for it. There's no other help for it."

"Yes—the infernal cowards wouldn't stand fire!" assented Berry, and the two leaders followed their retreating comrades at full speed.

"There they go!" cried Burt Edwards, of the Deadshots, who first caught sight of them. "Hurrah, boys! Come on—they fly like cowards!"

"Hurrah—run 'em down!" cried Buffalo Bill, Jr. "Down with the horse-thieves!"

Then the race commenced in dead earnest. The pursued rode for life. The pursuers rode to catch and crush out the most daring band of counterfeiters and horse-thieves that ever infested the great West.

The desperadoes dreaded going through Cheyenne with a band of pursuers at their heels, so they turned into another road that led off towards the hills to the north of the town.

"They are making for the hills!" cried Buffalo Bill, spurring his horse forward. "Run 'em down, boys. Don't let 'em get out of sight. We can ride as far as they can. Hurrah—hurrah—hurrah!"

The cheering of the pursuers did not make the desperadoes feel any better. On the contrary, it made them feel very bad, but they pushed on in the desperation of the moment, at times spurting ahead and almost getting out of sight of the pursuers.

Thus hour after hour passed, and the gray dawn found them still pushing for the chain north of them. Two of the desperadoes had abandoned their horses in a hollow where the darkness prevented their ruse from being seen by either friend or foe, and took to the woods.

Their horses, relieved of their riders, sprang forward and led the flyers.

The other desperadoes saw the empty saddles in dismay. They believed that the deadly marksmen of Buffalo Bill's band had slain the riders, and in a terror of fear spurred their jaded animals to a greater speed in order to escape a similar fate.

But both pursuers and pursued were now considerably fagged out, or rather their horses were, and therefore their speed was considerably abated. As they reached the hills, their horses climbed at a walk, so tired were their animals.

But the Deadshots had made up their minds to follow them to the North Pole if they went so far, and so the pursuit continued. The desperadoes made every effort to shake them off, but without avail. They hung on like an ague and never let them rest.

"What the devil do they want?" Crump asked, as he looked back at his indomitable pursuers.

"I guess they want us to stop," replied Berry, "but it won't pay. I am off for the Black Hills!"

CHAPTER XV.

LONE BEAR AND HIS TREACHERY.

ALL day long the pursuit continued, and the setting sun found them in a wild, hilly country, through which ran a road but little used.

"They can give us the dodge in the night, I fear," said Burt Edwards, as he rode alongside of Buffalo Bill.

"I have been thinking of that," replied Bill, "and don't believe they have the courage to separate now, though it would be the best thing for them under the circumstances."

"Yes, that's true, and Crump is sharp enough to know that. If we can't capture them before dark they will certainly give us the slip. Halloo! There was a shot in their front, and they recoil! What does it mean, I wonder?"

Buffalo Bill stopped and listened.

"Some kind of an enemy is in their front, that's certain," he said, after a pause. "By George, but they hoist a white flag and go forward! Who the devil can it be over there? There certainly are no hostile Indians about here at this season!"

"Let's hurry to the top of the hill and see who they are!" and they spurred their jaded horses to the top of the hill, over the brow of which Crump and his men had just disappeared.

When they reached the top of the hill they were astonished at seeing the desperadoes deliberately marching into an Indian camp, and surrendering themselves prisoners to about thirty warriors.

They were seen excitedly talking to the warriors and pointing up to the brow of the hill at Buffalo Bill and his Deadshots.

"They are saving their scalps by joining the redskins against us," remarked Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, and they will be nearly four to our one, too," said Burt Edwards. "We'll have our hands full now."

"I'd like ter hab my belly full," said Jack, on whom the cravings of hunger were having effect.

"We'll have to fight for our supper, boys," said the young leader, "and those Indians have got plenty of buffalo meat down there."

"Then I'se boun' fo' ter hab some o' dat meat, suah," answered Jack, unslinging his rifle menacingly.

"Don't be in a hurry, Jack," Bill said; "let's wait and see what they are going to do."

"Talk to my belly, Marse Bill. Dat am de bad part ob me now, dat's a fac'. Ef I waits enny longer I'll eat my hoss, tail an' all. Oh, golly, I smell somefin' good."

The Indians seemed to come to some sort of an understanding with Crump and his men, for they gave them water and food, while the body of warriors began to show fight in the direction of the Deadshots.

"They are coming this way!" said Heffernan, excitedly; "the hounds, we'll have to fight 'em."

"Well, we'll give 'em a taste of our skill at long range. Don't let 'em get near enough to reach us, boys. Now let 'em have it!"

Thirteen long range repeating rifles belched forth flame and smoke and lead, and nine savages bit the dust with bullets in their bodies.

"Oh, the devil!" cried Buffalo Bill, "four of you shot somebody else's man, so that only nine were hit. Listen how they yell! Ha-ha-ha! Their balls can't reach us! Let 'em have another round—there! That was better! Whoop! They run back for the camp! Give 'em another! There they go—robbers and all, leaving their horses! Now run for the provisions in the camp—charge!"

The young Deadshots charged down the hill on their jaded horses, and the terrified savages and desperadoes broke for the woods beyond the spring.

On reaching the camp the hungry Deadshots found a quantity of dried buffalo meat which they eagerly snatched up and devoured.

The Indians and their white allies retreated to the woods, howling and firing ineffectual shots at the brave young fellows, whose long-range rifles kept them out of the range of the ordinary muzzle loading guns.

"Golly, but dis am tough eatin'!" exclaimed Jack, tugging vigorously at a piece of dried meat. "It's wusser dan eatin' er raw-hide boot!"

"Swallow it whole, Jack," suggested Teddy O'Neil.

"I'd er heap rader be killed dan choked ter def," said Jack, cutting chips from the hard, dried meat and putting them in his mouth. "Dem Injuns mus' be awful tough ef dey libs on dis hyer meat. Efer dog lib on dis he'd lib a fousan' years, suah."

The others laughed heartily, and followed his example in trying to get something good out of the hard, dry meat.

"A little of it will go a long way," said Joe Bledsoe.

"Yes, sa—a fousan' miles," Jack muttered, as he vainly struggled with a mouthful of the meat.

"It must be bull buffalo," Ralph Homer remarked.

"De Lor' bress my brack soul!" cried Jack, springing up and holding his piece of dried meat out at arm's length, "an' I'se been er eatin' de horn!"

The Deadshots shouted. Some of them rolled on the grass in convulsions, during which time Jack snatched up a rifle and took deliberate aim at an Indian who was watching them nearly a half mile away, thinking himself safe enough at that distance.

The ball went clear through the Indian's body, and he fell with a death shriek loud and clear.

The other savages got further back into the woods, and nothing more was seen of them until a half hour later, when Buffalo Bill suddenly hoisted a white handkerchief on his rifle and started alone towards the woods where the savages were.

"Keep a watch out, boys," he said, "till I come back. I am going to have a talk with that Indian chief, whoever he is."

Burt Edwards and several others took their rifles and stood ready to cover him with their fire in case of any treachery, and Buffalo Bill marched boldly up the hill.

"What the devil do you want, Bill Eaton?" Crump demanded, from his place of concealment in the bushes.

"Halloo! Are you there, Crump?" he answered cheerily. "Come out and shake hands for the sake of old times."

"I'll be hanged if I do!" growled Crump. "You'd better get back or I'll put a bullet through you!"

"No danger of that. I want to talk to the chief."

"Ugh! Me talk with pale facel!" said a brawny savage, emerging from the bushes and advancing boldly to where the young leader of the Deadshots stood, extending his dirty hand.

"How do, brother?"

"Oh, I'm all right," said Bill, grasping the chief's hand and shaking it heartily. "I am sorry we had to kill so many of your warriors."

"You heap big warrior. Lone Bear feel bad. His braves are dead and horses all gone."

"You are Lone Bear! I have heard of you. Your enemies fly before you. Lone Bear is a great warrior. I am young Buffalo Bill, the friend of Lone Bear and his people. I was pursuing my enemies when Lone Bear defended them. Had I known that it was the great warrior, Lone Bear, I would have told my braves to run away and hide themselves. If Lone Bear will go back to his braves and seize those bad white men and deliver them to me, he can have their horses and those of the prisoners again, and Buffalo Bill will be his friend forever."

The subtle flattery intermingled in the talk of young Buffalo Bill everlastingly got away with Lone Bear. The chief's heart was nearly broken at the loss of all his horses and nearly half his warriors. He readily agreed to deliver Crump and his men to the Deadshots, and went back to carry out his bargain.

Young Buffalo Bill went back to the camp and told what he had done.

"Just listen for music up there in the woods," he said, after a pause. "Those fellows will be the worst sold of any men the world ever saw."

Lone Bear went back to his warriors and immediately called them around him, speaking in their native tongue, which none of the whites understood.

But there was something in his manner that aroused Crump's suspicion, and he whispered to Berry:

"I fear treachery. I don't like the looks of things."

"Nor I either. Warn the men."

Crump did warn them in whispers while the chief was speaking, but the men did not seem to think as he did.

But he and Berry kept their hands on their revolvers, and would not let an Indian get within ten feet of them, though the savages mingled freely with the others.

Suddenly the wily chief gave a whoop, and the savages threw themselves on the unsuspecting desperadoes and bore them to the earth.

Four of them attacked Crump and Berry, but they used their revolvers with such deadly effect as they retreated deeper into the forest, that they were not pursued, and thus they escaped.

CHAPTER XVI.

SHOOTING FOR LIFE.

WHEN Lone Bear and his braves made the attack on Crump and his desperadoes, Buffalo Bill, Jr., was listening for either shots or shouts.

He heard both, and knew that the savage chief was doing his work as he agreed.

"They're at it, boys!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, as he sprang to his feet in a fever of excitement.

"Whoop!" yelled Teddy O'Neil. "Let me get at 'em once an' foriver, the dirty blaggards!"

"Hold yer tongue, yer young debil," said Philosopher Jack. "Ef them yaller chaps 'll do yer fightin' yer let 'em do it ebery time. 'Kase yer gwine for ter git killed in a fight some time, suah. Dat skin ob yourn is boun' for ter get peeled some time, dat's er fac'."

"Why they are having a regular tussle for it!" said Burt Edwards, who was standing by Bill's side and listening to the shouts and shots.

"It's about over, though, I reckon," the young leader remarked, as a sudden silence ensued.

"Maybe they are all wiped out."

"No, I think not. There—one of the Indians is coming this way! Let's see what he wants!"

An Indian runner came towards the little group of Deadshots at full speed. Buffalo Bill advanced to meet him.

"Bad men all caught—ugh!" grunted the Indian.

"Lone Bear is a great chief," said Bill. "Tell him to bring his prisoners here."

The savage turned and ran back to the woods, glorying in the treachery of his tribe, and reported to Lone Bear the words of the young white chief.

In a few minutes the Indians were seen advancing with several prisoners, and the young Deadshots prepared to receive them.

As they came in Buffalo Bill noticed that there were but eight prisoners, and the next moment discovered the absence of the two desperadoes—Crump and Berry.

"Oh, the devil!" he exclaimed, as he gazed at the men, "they are not here—the very men I wanted!"

"Crump and Berry got away," said one of the prisoners.

"Why didn't you do the same?" he remarked. "If I can get hold of those two fellows I can break up this gang in a very few minutes. But they won't have men left when we get through."

"Why don't you fight us fairly?" one of the prisoners asked, "instead of getting these yellowskins to go back on us?"

"Oh, you are there, Mr. Horsethief!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill. "What have we been doing since last night, if not trying to get a fair fight out of you? We have chased you nearly a hundred miles to catch you. If you had given us a fair fight we would have been delighted at wiping you out that way."

The desperadoes were savage in their taunts of Lone Bear for his treachery, but the old rascal never noticed or replied to them.

Buffalo Bill put out his guards and camped there for the night, the Indians guarding the prisoners while the others guarded the camp.

When daylight came one of the guards saw a black bear looking at him from the edge of the bushes, and shot him.

Bruin fell dead in his tracks with a bullet in his brain, and a couple of men went forward to bring him in. He was a big fat fellow, and furnished fat, juicy steaks for all.

"That's a good meat as any man would want to eat," remarked Burt Edwards.

"Nuffin wanted now," said Jack, "but

some coon graby for ter pour ober it," and he smacked his thick lips in ecstatic memory of his favorite gravy.

The breakfast over with, Buffalo Bill, Jr., ordered a rifle target to be placed at five hundred yards against a big tree.

The prisoners and the Indians looked on with considerable interest.

When the target was in position, one of the prisoners asked:

"Do you waste powder and ball at that foolishness?"

"Not often," replied Bill, "but we are going to throw away a little this morning. Your life depends upon your marksmanship."

"What!" gasped the prisoner, turning pale.

"I mean that you have got to shoot for your life," coolly replied Bill. "We are going to have a shooting match with you. If you beat us you are free to go on with your horse-stealing. If we beat you we will hang you."

"I—I won't shoot!" stammered the wretch.

"Oh, well, we'll hang you all the same, then. You can take your choice. It doesn't make any difference with us, you know. Perhaps some of your Indian friends will shoot for you."

The look of blank dismay that came over the faces of the prisoners was so ludicrous that some of the band really could not help laughing at them.

"Dey hab got ter do some mity good shoot-in' ter beat dis chile," said Jack, a broad grin on his ebony face. "Ef I war dem I wouldn't miss dat targit. Et would be 'er bad miss—er mity onhealthy miss, dat's er fac'."

"Now, horse-thieves," said Buffalo Bill, "I am going to give you one more chance for your lives. Each one of you can have three shots at that target. One of my men will follow each of you, and if he beats you you will hang. If you beat, you will be free to go where you please. I would be justified in hanging you anyway, but I will be more generous and merciful."

"That's a blasted poor chance," growled one of the prisoners.

"I admit that it is," said Bill, "but still it is better than you would have done by us, now, isn't it, eh? You intended to shoot us down as we came out of our houses night before last, so don't say a word about fair play in this thing. First man forward."

Not a man of the prisoners moved.

"Untie that man there, Jack," said Bill, pointing to the man nearest him.

"Yes, sah," and Jack at once unloosed the bonds that held him.

"You can have one of our rifles or your own," said the leader of the Deadshots.

"Mine will not hold true so far," said the prisoner.

"Yes, it will," said Edwards, examining the prisoner's rifle. "You can use mine, and I will use yours."

"But I don't know anything about yours," said the man again.

"Oh, well, if you prefer to hang without shooting, you can do so," and Buffalo Bill proceeded to call the next man.

"I—I—will shoot," stammered the wretch.

"I—wish I'd—never seen a horse."

"Repentance comes too late, my boy," said Buffalo Bill; "you will have to shoot for it now."

"Give me my gun," said the man, with a hard look in his eyes. The gun was handed him.

He aimed slowly and deliberately and pulled the trigger.

The ball struck within two inches of the bull's eye.

"That's a good shot!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill. "I hope you won't do so well next time."

The second shot was even better, and the Deadshots applauded him.

The third shot struck the bull's eye! Pale and almost speechless the man dropped his gun and staggered away a few paces.

He believed he had saved his life, and the reaction of his feelings almost overpowered him.

CHAPTER XVII.

A TERRIBLE RETRIBUTION.

BUFFALO BILL looked around at his men and asked:

"Who can hang that fellow?"

"I can," promptly answered every man in the band.

But Burt Edwards had stepped forward and taken the place the horse-thief had just vacated.

He leveled his repeating rifle and fired quickly, the ball passing through the center of the bull's-eye.

"Very good," said Bill, "that ties his last shot. Plant another one there and up he goes!"

"Move the target a half inch to the right!" Edwards called out to the man near the target.

The man moved it.

"What's that for?" the man asked, suspiciously.

"I don't want my second bullet to go right in the hole the first one made in the tree," was Burt's reply.

The doomed horse-thief turned pale as death.

Was he to hang after all?

Burt Edwards fired a second shot.

The bull's-eye was pierced again and the ball lodged in the tree.

"Very good—another one," said Bill.

The third shot entered the same hole that the two former ones had.

"That hangs him!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, and the next instant three or four men seized the doomed wretch and bound him again.

"Now for the next man!"

Another one was untied and made to shoot three times.

He made very good shots, but Cyrus Cammack easily beat him, and he too was put in bonds again.

The third man—a big, burly fellow, whose defiance had been noticed ever since the capture—stepped forward and fired twice, making but indifferent shots.

The third time, instead of firing at the target, he suddenly wheeled and fired at Buffalo Bill, the ball grazing his head so closely as to cut the hair smooth with the scalp, and the powder burnt his face and blinded him momentarily.

"De Lor' gorramity!" exclaimed Philosopher Jack, springing forward and planting his bullet-head full in the bully's stomach, knocking him all in a heap on the ground.

Buffalo Bill staggered back a few paces and put his hands up to his eyes.

The others promptly secured the bully, binding him hand and foot.

"Are you hurt?" Cyrus Cammack asked, running up to the young leader of the Deadshots.

"No, I think not," replied Bill, rubbing his eyes and shaking his head.

"Let me cut his throat for him!" cried Joe Bledsoe, drawing his knife and approaching the wretch, who was called "Big Barney."

"No—don't touch him!" called Bill. "Only keep him safe, that's all I want."

Joe was prevented from doing "Big Barney" any harm, and the shooting went on, one after another of the horse-thieves being badly beaten. Jack beat one so badly that even his own doomed comrades sneered at and taunted him.

The Indians were astonished at the splendid shooting, and regarded the Deadshots as something more than human.

"Big shoot!" exclaimed Lone Bear, as he watched each shot and saw one after another of the horse-thieves go down in the contest.

"Now for the hanging," said Bill, turning to the band of brave men about him. "Get your halters, boys."

"Look hyer, Bill Eaton," cried "Big Barney," "are you going to murder us?"

"Oh, no," was the bland reply.

"What the d—l do you call hanging, then?"

"I call it hanging," said Bill. "You probably call your attempt to kill me just now shooting. It's all the same, though, I reckon."

"But give a fellow a chance."

"You've had your chance and abused it. I'll hold you back for the last so you can enjoy the racket. Put halters on them, boys."

The halters were put on each of the doomed men.

"See hyer!" cried one, "we hain't had no trial. Whar's Judge Lynch?"

"Judge Lynch's court isn't in session to-day," said Burt Edwards. "You have been caught fairly, and must go straight to the devil!"

"Take 'em to the woods," was the next order, and the entire band of whites and Indians went up the hill to the woods, and halted under a large spreading tree.

"What shall we do with 'em when it's over?" Cammack asked.

"Nothing. Let 'em hang there," was the reply. "Too much trouble to bury them."

Big Barney heard it, and, tied as he was, with a halter around his neck, he resolved to make a daring attempt to get away.

When he thought they were not paying any special attention to him, he attempted to trip the man who was leading him.

The man, Jake Sourboch, fell to the ground, but held on to the halter, though Barney dragged him some distance over the ground as he tried to get away.

"Catch 'im—catch 'im!" cried Jake, as he held on manfully.

The others rushed forward and secured the big bully before he could do any further mischief.

"It's no use," said Bill, shaking his head, "though I don't blame you for trying to get away. Your time has come, and you may as well make up your mind to meet it as a brave man."

The big bully broke down completely, and dropped on his knees.

"Mercy!" he gasped.

"Oh, don't make a fool of yourself," said Burt Edwards. "You would never have shown any to us, so don't ask it. You won't do yourself any good by whining."

"Big pale-face cry like pappoose," said Long Bear, contemptuously. "Sing death-song, and die heap brave."

"Dat's de tork!" exclaimed Philosopher Jack. "Ef I was a-gwine ober de ribber dat way, I'd go game, and shake hands wid de shinin' angels on t'other side. Ef yer ain't game, dey won't show up wid yer ober dere."

The big bully turned pale as death, and still whined for mercy.

"String up the first man!" was the order.

"I—I'll—join—your band!" faltered the man, as he was led under the tree and the end of the halter thrown over the limb, "and tell you all about the gang."

"Never mind. You're too late. You should have done that some time ago. I think we can take care of the balance of the gang. Up with him, boys!"

Three of the Deadshots took hold of the halter and pulled away with all their might.

The body of the doomed wretch went up some five or six feet above the ground, and there twisted, contracted, squirmed, and gave every sign of horrible strangulation, the others looking on with a trembling realization of their own fate.

The halter was secured to another limb, and the body left dangling in the air.

"This is a horrible affair, boys!" said Buffalo Bill, Junior, "but it's in self-defense. These rascals have twice attempted our lives, and they are professional horse-thieves. We are very sure of not hearing from these again. Up with the next one."

The next one was taken and run up without either begging for mercy or making any resistance. He died in silence, knowing the uselessness of such conduct.

"Up with the next!" cried the young leader of the Deadshots, and the third man was seized.

He fought and wrestled and screamed like a madman, but without avail.

They ran him up on another limb in full view of the others.

The others soon followed until only Big Barney remained.

"Now you can have your turn, sir," said Buffalo Bill, Junior, turning to him. "We have let you live longer than the others in order that you might enjoy the show. I hope you have enjoyed it to your heart's content."

With an oath the desperate man tried to kick him, but he was too well bound to give him any freedom with his legs.

"Oh, you are not quite resigned to your fate," said Bill. "You don't know how to do such things. Now, I know you have murdered men who died with more courage than you. Give us a good specimen of the game cock."

"Shoot me—cut my throat!" cried the trembling wretch. "Don't hang me—don't hang me!"

"Why should we shoot you?" Bill asked. "You only deserve to die the death of a dog. Hanging is too good for you, but that's the meanest we can give you. We will send Crump and Berry over the river after you just as soon as we can catch them. Look out for them, and let horses alone up there."

The men then threw the end of the halter over the limb and commenced pushing him up.

Such gasping shrieks as ran through these

woods! But they were soon hushed, and then all was still.

They were all hanging to the trees—dead fruit!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ENGLISHMAN—JIM BODIE.

"Now see to the horses, men!" Bill ordered and the Deadshots went back from the scene of the execution to where their horses were feasting on the short green grass of the hills, and secured them.

Then Lone Bear was told that he and his braves could have all the others, and with a shout they sprang forward to secure the best ones of their number.

"The red devils love horseflesh," said Burt Edwards, as he watched the eagerness with which they rushed for the horses.

"Yes, and it's the best haul they have made in a good while."

When they were all caught the Indians came up to where the Deadshots sat in the saddle ready to start on the return trip.

"Two of these men got away, Lone Bear," said Buffalo Bill to the chief. "If you will catch them and bring them down to Cheyenne, or send me word that you have got them, I will give you a fine horse for each of them."

"Ugh!" grunted Lone Bear, "me ketch 'um—git hoss. Lone Bear big chief."

"Oh, yes, you are a great chief," said Bill, "and you are the white man's friend. Buffalo Bill will remember Lone Bear and send him a present."

They all shook hands with the savages then, and rode away, going southward in the direction of Cheyenne.

"We won't travel so fast going back, boys," said Buffalo Bill, "we'll take our time. And remember that not a word must be said about this lynching business up here, you know."

"Of course not," assented Burt Edwards, "we have done our duty, but we won't blow about it."

"During the day they killed a deer, which attempted to run across the road some distance in advance of the party."

A well directed shot also secured them a jackass rabbit, which Jack said, would be good to season the deer meat with.

That night they encamped on the bank of a small stream, cooked and ate heartily of deer steaks and rabbit, without bread, and then stretched themselves on the ground for a good nap of sleep, putting a guard over the horses to prevent them being stampeded by enemies or thieves.

They slept well, ate a hearty breakfast and then resumed their journey southward, reaching Cheyenne by sunset.

They stopped at Jim Ruggles' saloon for a few minutes, and were about to mount when Ruggles whispered to Buffalo Bill:

"Come in to-morrow. I've something to tell you."

"All right," and then they rode off to their respective homes, where they felt that they would not be visited again by Crump's band of horse-thieves.

The next day Buffalo Bill rode into Cheyenne to see Jim Ruggles and hear what he had to tell him.

"What is it, Jim?" he asked, after taking a drink with the genial saloonist.

"There's a party of rich Englishmen here," whispered Jim in reply, "who want to go on a big hunt, and Jim Bodie, who came in yesterday or the day before, has got the place of guide for the party. You know what Bodie is. He'll get his gang posted somewhere in a canyon, lead the Englishmen into the trap, and get away with 'em for the plunder they have with them."

"How many Englishmen are there in the party?" Bill asked.

"Five in all."

"See if you can't get them to let three young men join them," Bill said, after a pause.

"Why?"

"Burt Edwards, Teddy O'Neil and Bill Eaton would like to go with them."

"Ah, yes," and Ruggles smiled all over his face.

"Jim Bodie doesn't know me," said Bill, "or any of my band. We can join them below, and Bodie will never know who we are. When are they going to start?"

"In two or three days, I believe."

"See if you can manage it, then. I will

come in to-morrow in disguise, or send one of my men, and you let me know all about it."

"Suppose I send for one of the Englishmen and you both talk it over in my back room here?" suggested Ruggles.

"Good! But don't you give my name away. Bodie would know me then."

"Well, select your handle."

"Call me Johnson. That's a good name."

Ruggles then sent a messenger in search of the leader of the English party, and two of them came back with him.

They were shown into the little back room, where Bill was waiting for them.

Ruggles introduced "Mr. Johnson" to them.

They were very polite, but rather "offish" in their treatment.

"Take seats, gentlemen," he said, "I have a proposition to make you."

"What about?" they asked.

"I understand you are going out hunting on the plains in a few days."

"Yes."

"Two companions and myself, with a servant who is an excellent camp cook, desire to join your party. We can give you references as to who and what we are."

The Englishmen looked at the young man and took quite a fancy to him from first glance.

"Have you ever hunted on the plains?" one of them asked.

"Yes, many a time. We have killed bears, buffaloes and Indians in our hunts."

"Indians!"

"Yes."

"Are they troublesome?"

"Sometimes—when they think you are not strong enough to resist," was the reply.

"Then the more we have in our party the safer it will be. Of course we shall be happy to have you and your friends go with us, Mr. Johnson. We have secured the services of a splendid guide—a Mr. James Bodie. Do you know him?"

"I have heard of him, but never met him. He has a reputation in his line, I believe."

"So we have been told."

"When do you start?"

"In two days. We will start at daylight, going northwest from here."

"Northwest!"

"Yes—why?"

"I thought game was better south of here at this season! Bodie knows best, though, perhaps."

"Well, if we don't find any game up that way, we can turn south?"

"Yes—very easily."

Bill had soon arranged to join the party at a junction of two roads ten miles from Cheyenne, on the morning of the start, and then he took leave of them to return to his home.

"Now, Jim Brodie," muttered Bill, as he mounted his horse, "if you don't tumble into my trap this time, I'll shake hands and call it square between us," and putting spurs to his horse he dashed off at full speed.

CHAPTER XIX.

PHILOSOPHER JACK'S PERIL AND REVENGE.

As may be surmised from Young Buffalo Bill's remarks as he rode away from Ruggles' saloon that day, he had an object in wishing to join the Englishmen's hunting expedition.

Had he not heard that the notorious Jim Bodie had been employed as guide for the party, he would not have cared to go. But he knew Bodie by reputation, and had learned that he was connected with the gang of horse thieves under Crump and Berry.

"Those Englishmen have money, watches and fine horses," said Buffalo Bill, as he rode homeward, "and that is the game he is going to guide into some kind of a trap, as sure as my name is Bill Eaton. We will give 'em a taste of cunning that will make 'em sick. I want Burt and Teddy and Cyrus and Black Jack in the game."

Before he reached his home, he rode by the farm of Burt Edwards' father, called Burt out and told him of his plan.

Burt was delighted.

"Buffaloes and horse thieves!" he exclaimed; "why, we'll have a jolly time, Bill!"

"Yes. I only wish we could get the whole band along, but the Englishmen won't have so many."

"Suppose Tom Travers leads the band as an independent party of hunters and keeps them within a half a day's ride of us?"

Buffalo Bill remained in deep thought for nearly a minute, and then blurted out:

"Yes, by the great grizzlies! That's just the idea. They may be able to join us when once we meet far out on the plains. Call a meeting of the band for to-morrow evening, when we will talk it over. Tom Travers is just the dare-devil to lead them into any kind of a racket."

Burt promised to notify the other members of the band, and the young leader rode on to his own home to get the rest that night he was so much in need of.

That night he was awakened by his father and told that a bright light in the direction of Philosopher Jack's cabin looked as though the black's home was in danger.

Jack's cabin was nearly a mile away, but its position was well known to every member of the band.

"That's Jack's cabin, as sure as fate!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, Jr., as he gazed in the direction of the light. "Jack was always careless about fire, and— Did you hear that?"

"I thought I heard a rifle shot," said the old man, quietly.

"You did. The nigger is in trouble. Get me my rifle while I dress, quick!"

By the time he was dressed the old man had his faithful weapons ready for him.

"Bill—Bill!" cried a voice at the front door.

"That's Burt," exclaimed Buffalo Bill.

"I'll be out in a second."

"Hurry up!" cried Burt, "Jack's cabin is on fire."

"Yes—come," and the two brave fellows bounded away on foot, running at the top of their speed, taking a narrow, unfrequented path that cut off considerable distance.

Neither spoke a word for several minutes, but their hard breathing as they ran betrayed the ardor of their feelings, and the violence of their efforts to reach the scene of the fire as soon as possible.

They soon came in sight of the cabin, or rather the ruins of it, for it was almost reduced to ashes.

"Where is the nigger?" hissed Buffalo Bill, as he glared around. "I am sure I heard a rifle shot in this direction."

"So did I," said Burt; "Oh, if we only had my dog here to trail the rascals who—Hark!"

The two men held their breaths in silence and listened.

Voices were heard in the wood, down beyond the place where the cabin stood.

"They are there, thank Heaven!" whispered Buffalo Bill. "We are not too late; we can avenge if we cannot save him! Come around this way. Why, there they are, three men, with Jack tied up."

Burt looked in the direction indicated, and saw, by the light of the burning coals, a party of three white men, with the ebony Deadshot bound in their midst.

"Let's go around so we can have them between us and the house. The light will give us a fair show then."

The two brave fellows crept around in the woods, so as to get the party between them and the light, and then waited to see what they would do.

"Why, they are going to hang him!" whispered Burt.

"Well, let's see how far they will go—keep quiet."

One of the three men put a halter around Jack's neck and adjusted it brutally, at which Jack, though his hands were tied behind him, butted him full in the face, smashing his nose as flat as a pancake.

The wretch put both hands up to his broken proboscis.

"The d—d nigger has broken me all up!"

"I broke yer up wuss den dat ef yer hangs me. Afore God, I'll come fur yer like dem ghostesses an' make yer run like de debil, suah!"

"Oh, you'd like to scare us, now, wouldn't you?" said one of the party, taking up the end of the halter and throwing it over a limb. "But that game won't work. You needn't bother yourself about the ghost business. I don't think the devil will trust you outside of his kitchen for the purpose of playing ghosts."

"We'll see 'bout dat," said Jack. "Dis chile ain't a feered ter die. Ef Marse Bill don't swing yer up for dis, de debil may hab me for kin'lin' wood. suah."

"We'll tend to him, too, my fine lump of charcoal, and all of his band, so up you go," and he commenced to pull on the halter.

The other two laid hold to help him, and they were about to raise the victim off his feet, when a rifle shot resounded through the woods, and all three came near falling to the ground.

A bullet from Buffalo Bill's rifle had cut the halter in twain.

They scrambled to their feet and looked at the halter they held in their hands.

Buffalo Bill gave a signal which Jack readily understood, and he knew at once that he was safe.

"He-he-he!" he chuckled, "dat ain't strong enuff tu hang a nigger, dat's a fac'. Nigger mity hard for tu hang, anyhow."

"Who fired that shot?" one of the men asked, looking at his two comrades.

"Let me see dat haltah?" Jack asked, and one of the men held the end that had been cut by the bullet so that he could see it.

"Dat war Buffalo Bill," he said, "and dem Deadshots am heah for er fac', an'—hol' on, dar!"

The three men started to run into the dark recesses of the forest, but three shots in rapid succession brought them down, each with a broken leg.

"Jes' in time!" exclaimed Jack, as Burt Edwards ran up to him and cut the bonds that bound him.

"Oh, we are always on hand," said Burt. "Sorry we didn't get here in time to save your cabin. Better late than never, though."

"Dat's er fac'. Ef yer waited longer, yer'd a found a black apple on dat tree, bress de Lor'."

The groans of the three wounded men were pitiful to hear.

"What's er matter wid yer, eh?" Jack demanded, going to them. "Yer ain't hurt, is yer?"

They only groaned.

"Ah, youse is cold. Come to de fire an' get warm," and seizing one by the leg he ran toward the mass of glowing coals with him, and, before anyone suspected his object, hurled him into the fire.

"Great God!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, "this is horrible, but the wretch deserved it. Heavens, how he howls!"

The helpless man made the woods resound with his screams, but in a minute or two he was silent, the intense heat of the great bed of coals literally roasting him.

Without uttering a word, Jack seized the next man, and rushed to the fire with him. He screamed, and begged for mercy, but Jack was now a relentless demon. He hurled him into the lurid coals, and started for the third man.

Bang! went a revolver, and the man rolled over, dead.

He had escaped the fire by blowing out his brains.

CHAPTER XX.

OFF FOR THE HUNT.

"DAT man wasn't no fool," said Jack, shaking his head as he looked at the suicide, "but de fire am de place for 'im, anyhow," and taking him by the leg, he dragged him to the fire and threw him in.

The smell of burning flesh was almost overpowering.

"How did it happen, Jack?" Buffalo Bill asked, as they walked away from the fire with the black.

"Oh, dey come and call me out," said Jack, "an' I tried fo' ter get to de woods, but dey shot at me an' knocked me down, an'—dat's all."

"Where is your horse?"

"Dunno nuffin'. I lef' him in de stable dar," and he led the way to a little shelter which he dignified by the name of stable and there found his horse all right.

"Your horse is all right," said Burt Edwards.

"So are the horses they rode there," remarked young Buffalo Bill, suddenly turning and listening. "I heard the sound of a horse champing a bit down in the bushes there."

"Well, let's go and see about it," said Burt, and all three started off together in the direction indicated.

They found three horses hitched in the bushes, and took possession of them.

"I would give something to know who those fellows were," said Bill, as he led one of the horses away toward the light.

"Yes, I think we made a mistake in not questioning them before Jack finished them."

assented Burt. "We might have obtained some information from them."

"I wonder how many more there are of that gang? It seems to me that they must be thinning out some in this section."

"Dat's er fac!" commented Jack.

"Maybe they'll let the Deadshots alone after awhile," remarked Burt.

"Well, if I belonged to their gang I would keep away from Cheyenne—yes, several hundred miles away," remarked Bill, "as it seems to be very unhealthy out here for them."

"Well, it seems so. Where will Jack go now? He has no house, you know."

"He can go with me," replied Bill, "and to-morrow we can club together and build him another cabin."

"So we can."

"Dat's er fac, buil' it right dar!" and Jack pointed to the heap of burning logs as he spoke.

"Hadn't you better have it built nearer the main road, Jack?"

"Nah, sah. Dem's lucky numbers, dem debbils in dat fire. Dey won't nebber bodder me agin."

"That's pretty certain, I believe," said Bill, laughing. "Come, let's go to my place and get some sleep, and to-morrow we'll all pitch in and put up another cabin."

They moved off and soon entered the main road, riding the horses, and in less than ten minutes were at the Eaton place, where Jack was given quarters till morning.

Early next morning farmers began to come up from all directions in search of information about the fire they had seen the night before, and were astounded at the news of the burning of the three men who had attempted to hang Jack.

Jack was very popular among the farmers, and by noon about fifty men had volunteered to help put up another cabin.

Sending home for axes, they went to work cutting timber, and ere night came on they had another one up except the roof, which was put on the next day.

Then they chipped in and bought him more household necessities than he had before the fire.

They admired pluck, and Jack had plenty of that. The color of his skin made no difference with them.

The three horses of the would-be murderers were given to him, the titles to which were certified by a dozen of the wealthiest farmers in the neighborhood.

That night the meeting of the band of Deadshots took place. It had been postponed on account of Jack's misfortune; and the question of the proposed buffalo hunt was discussed.

It was agreed at once that Tom Travers should lead the band on a hunt, while Bill, Burt, Teddy, Cyrus and Jack should go with the Englishmen.

"Keep it a profound secret, boys," said Buffalo Bill, Jr., "and be ready to start in the morning," and then the meeting broke up.

At daylight Buffalo Bill, Jr., and his four comrades set out for the junction of the roads where they were to meet the party of Englishmen. They were in the best of spirits, for it was as hunters they first acquired their wonderful skill as marksmen.

At the junction they found that the party had not yet passed, so they waited nearly two hours before they caught sight of them.

The Englishmen greeted them cordially, but Bodie seemed to be angry at this addition to the party.

"You engaged me to guide a party of five, sir," he said to the head of the party, "and here we have ten."

"Ten or a hundred," retorted the Englishman, "what difference does it make to you? We pay you for your knowledge of the route, and not for the number of our party."

"And we guides sell our knowledge according to the number of buyers," replied Bodie.

"Oh, that's all right, Mr. Guide," said Bill, on hearing the reply. "We will pay proportionately—that is, double, what the gentlemen agreed to give you, though we have no need of your services. We know the ground as well as you do, perhaps."

"Then we had better discharge him," suggested one of the economical Englishmen.

"Oh, no; I wouldn't go under such circumstances. Let him have the job by all means."

"You know the plains?" Bodie asked, turn-

ing suddenly upon Bill. "Have you ever hunted buffalo?"

"Yes, several times," was the reply.

"What is your name?"

"Johnson."

"Where do you live?"

"East," was the vague reply.

Bodie seemed terribly annoyed, which did not escape the notice of the Englishmen.

"The larger the party the safer we will be from the savages," one of them remarked.

"There is no danger of savages," said Bodie.

"What's the matter with you?" Burt Edwards asked. "Do you object to our company?"

"I didn't agree to guide so many."

"Then don't guide us. Guide the others. We will go along without a guide," and the entire party burst into a hearty laugh at Bodie's expense.

"We'll all go together," said the leader of the English party, with considerable emphasis, and then turning to Bodie, added: "And you may go back if you don't like it."

"I am not the man to go back when I once start," replied Bodie.

"Give me your hand on that!" exclaimed Bill Eaton, extending his hand toward the guide. "I like that kind of talk. Shake."

Bodie took the proffered hand, but with a very bad grace—a fact that made him very unpopular with the Englishmen's party.

They then remounted and started off together, going towards the hills to the northwest.

"Do you expect to find buffalo in the hills?" Burt asked, when they had ridden some ten miles further.

"No," replied Bodie, "but I do expect to find them beyond the hills, where they were grazing in large numbers last week."

"Oh, I hadn't heard of that," said Burt.

"Guess you haven't been out much this season," remarked Bodie.

"No, not in this direction," was the evasive reply.

"Where did you ever hunt?" the guide asked, with the least bit of sarcasm in his tones.

"I've hunted north of the Platte," replied Burt, "and killed a few buffaloes."

"Who did you hunt with?"

"A young fellow by the name of Eaton headed the party, and he was a splendid hunter, too."

Bodie seemed suddenly interested.

"Was he called Buffalo Bill, Jr.?" he asked, quickly.

"Yes, they sometimes called him that, I believe. He could get away with more buffaloes than any man I ever saw."

"I have heard of him. Where is he now?"

"Off on a hunt, somewhere, I believe," was the truthful reply.

"You are well acquainted with him, are you?"

"Yes, quite so."

"What kind of a fellow is he?"

"Medium size, dark hair and eyes, generous to a fault, and as full of fight as a terrier."

"I would like to see him."

"Well, we may come across his party somewhere on the plains," said Burt, and he thought he saw an expression on the guide's face that plainly said: "I hope not."

CHAPTER XXI.

A TREACHEROUS GUIDE.

THE first night out they spent near a large spring at the foot of a low range of hills.

Pasturage was good, water abundant, and the Deadshots in the party had killed several fowls, which Philosopher Jack had prepared in the most approved style for supper.

But on retiring, two of the Deadshots mounted guard over the little camp.

Bodie looked on with amazement.

"What are you going to do?" he asked; "stand guard all night?"

"That's about the size of it," replied Cyrus Cammack, nonchalantly.

"Why, there isn't an Indian within a hundred miles of us!" exclaimed the guide.

"You never know where an Indian is in this country," replied Cyrus. "Came near losing a scalp once. Don't take any more chances with 'em. The only good Indians are dead ones," and with that Cyrus took up a position where he could command a view of all approaches to the camp.

Muttering unintelligibly to himself, Bodie

rolled himself in his blanket and pretended to go to sleep.

The others slept soundly, but the guide seemed restless and ill at ease, rolling and tumbling about as though very much disturbed about something.

At midnight Cyrus called up Burt Edwards to relieve him.

Burt was slow about getting up.

Bodie arose quickly and said:

"Let me take your place. I am not sleepy, and I think a little guard duty would do me good."

"You can stand guard if you like," said Burt. "In fact, I would like to have company; it passes the time away pleasantly."

"But you needn't stand," said Bodie. "One will be enough."

"Of course, but we never trust others to do what we can do ourselves. You see we have been out together before, and have learned to know each other."

"Well, I'll sit up with you till I get sleepy," he said, a shade of vexation manifest on his face.

For nearly an hour Burt kept him busy in a whispered conversation, when they were startled by a coyote barking.

Bodie seemed extremely nervous.

"I never like to hear those pesky varmints," he remarked. "I never lose a chance to kill 'em. They are the sneaks of the plains."

"Yes; and they don't often sneak up here in the hills," replied Burt. "That coyote runs on two legs."

"Do you really think so?" Bodie asked, suddenly looking up.

"Of course I do. That was a poor imitation of a coyote. Indians do better than that. It's some bungling white trash up to some mischief or other."

Such a look as came into his eyes! Burt knew he hit the nail, and kept up his talk.

The barking was continued at intervals.

"Hanged if I don't put a stop to that yelping!" exclaimed Bodie, seizing his gun and starting off in the direction of the coyote's locality. "Keep your eyes open till I come back," and before Burt could say a word to prevent him, the guide had disappeared in the bushes up on the hillside.

"Cyrus—Cyrus!" whispered Burt, loud enough for Cammack to hear him. "Get up, quick!"

Cyrus sprang from his blanket, for he was a light sleeper, and ran up to Burt's side.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Stand guard till I follow Bodie," and without further explanation he darted away in pursuit of the guide.

Once in the bushes he crept forward with the stealthy step of a panther, and behind a small knoll, discovered a party of a dozen men in a whispered conversation. He could distinguish the burly form of Bodie among them.

They spent nearly a half hour there, and then the guide started to return to the camp.

"We'll join you to-morrow," Burt heard one of the men say to him. "It's our only chance."

"Better come in late, just before we go in camp," said the guide, and then he disappeared in the direction of the camp.

Burt hastened to get back to camp in advance of him, and succeeded in doing so.

"Get to your blanket as soon as you can!" he whispered to Cyrus, and taking his place on guard again, was there to receive Bodie when he came in.

"Did you find the coyote?" he asked of the guide.

"No, he sneaked off, I suppose, when he heard me coming. They are the biggest cowards in the world."

"Except the horse-thieves beyond Cheyenne," added Burt. "Three of 'em tried to get away with a nigger the other night. They caught him, burnt his cabin, and were going to hang him when Buffalo Bill and one of his men went to his rescue, shot them down and threw them wounded into the fire."

"Well, now, wasn't it cowardly to throw three wounded men into the fire?" Bodie asked.

"That depends on circumstances," replied Burt. "All horse-thieves and murderers ought to be burned or hanged, whichever is most convenient at the time of their capture."

"Well, I believe in giving a man a fair trial."

"A chance to escape you mean."

"No—but a trial by jury."

"I saw several trials of horse-thieves by a

jury in Cheyenne last year. They actually acquitted two horse-thieves who confessed to the stealing, as they did five others who were found with the property in their possession. Some of the gang had got on the jury each time. Judge Lynch does better than a jury in this part of the country."

Bodie made no reply to that.

He went back to his blanket and in a few moments was sleeping soundly.

When daylight came Burt Edwards was found at his post faithfully guarding the little camp.

Jack was up bright and early, and soon had a hot breakfast for the entire party, after eating which they mounted and rode away, still keeping toward the hills on the north-west, Bodie declaring that buffalo was plentiful beyond that range.

The day passed and night came on again.

The guide began to cast about for a suitable place to camp, which he found near a small stream.

"Halloo, strangers!" cried a voice up the stream some distance, "on a hunt, eh?"

"Yes," replied Bodie.

"So are we. Come up here where it's dryer than down there."

"Shall we go up there?" Bodie asked of the leader of the English party.

"Yes, if you think it better than here. Do you know that party?"

"No. They are strangers to me."

"Is it safe to risk them?"

"Oh, I guess we can take care of ourselves," remarked the guide, as he led the way up the stream to where the others were encamped.

Buffalo Bill, Jr., and his four faithful Deadshots kept together behind the party.

The Englishmen rode up into the very midst of nearly a dozen stalwart men and dismounted.

The Deadshots dismounted and joined them.

Their approach was noticed by the strangers, and a commotion seemed to exist among them.

Suddenly a man glared into the young leader's face, and exclaimed:

"Buffalo Bill, Jr., by thunder!"

The ominous sound of cocking revolvers told of a coming danger, and the next moment it came.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FIGHT—BUFFALO BILL, JR., WOUNDED.

"Yes, I am Buffalo Bill, Jr.," said Bill, coolly facing Crump and Berry, revolver in hand. "And you are Crump, the counterfeiter and horse-thief!"

Jim Bodie was utterly dumfounded when he discovered that he had been piloting the famous Deadshots for two days, and drew his revolver quickly.

Teddy O'Neil was watching him, and fired—getting the drop on him, and breaking his pistol arm.

"Kill the bloody ould horse-thaves!" he yelled; and the next instant a dozen revolvers were blazing away, to the great consternation of the Englishmen, who were now realizing the worst stories that they had ever heard of Western characteristics.

Crump and Berry opened fire on Buffalo Bill, both hitting him.

Philosopher Jack shot Berry through the head, and Buffalo Bill wounded Crump, while Burt, Cyrus, and Teddy poured shot after shot into the other party.

"Whoop!" yelled Teddy. "Kill the horse-thaves of the wurruld!" and the next moment the Englishmen joined in and opened fire on them.

The horse-thieves retreated up the stream, leaving four of their number dead on the ground, and the darkness of the shadows of the trees in the gathering twilight protected them from the fire of the rifles of the party.

"Bill—Bill!" cried Burt Edwards, rushing to young Buffalo's side, "are you hurt? Have they hit you?"

Bill was pale, very pale, and he leaned heavily against Burt, as he said:

"Yes, Burt, I am hit hard."

He was the only one of the party hurt, for the villains had fired wildly in their sudden panic.

"Where are you hit?" demanded one of the Englishmen.

"In the breast and shoulder," he said.

Burt laid him gently down on the grass, and took off his hunting jacket and shirt.

A bullet had glanced against a rib, making

only a flesh wound, which was bleeding freely; another had made a flesh wound on his left shoulder.

One of the Britishers was a medical man, and he pronounced the wounds not dangerous, to the great relief of the others.

"I am not wiped out yet," said Bill, smiling, when told he was not shot through the breast. "I am good for that fellow, Crump, yet."

"Yes—we'll fetch him yet, pard," said Burt. "We've wiped out Berry, who was his right bower."

"I done dat wipin'," said Jack, "an' I neber got in but one shot, neider, dat's er fac."

"I would like to understand this business," said the leader of the party, while Bill's wound was being dressed. "Who can explain it to me?"

"I can," replied Burt.

"Have the kindness to do so, then."

Burt then related the history of the notorious gang of horse-thieves, and the band of Deadshots, to the interested Briton.

"But why did Mr. Eaton give me his name as Johnson?" the Briton asked.

"For a double purpose. He knew that the man you had hired as guide belonged to the gang, and suspected his game at once. Had he given you his real name, he would have been recognized by Bodie, and thus lost the chance to catch those fellows. You have made a narrow escape, for they would have murdered your party, taken your valuables, and left the world to blame the Indians for the crime."

The Englishmen were truly grateful, and devoted their time to the comfort of the wounded man.

Burt and Teddy stood guard during the night and the next day, Buffalo Bill being too sore to be moved, they concluded to remain where they were until he was able to travel.

On the second day Tom Travers and the balance of the band rode into the camp, and were received with shouts of welcome.

"What's the matter with you fellows?" Tom asked of Burt, the moment they shook hands. "What are you stuck down here in the woods for?"

"Bill is hurt," replied Burt, "and we are waiting for him to get over it. We had a devil of a row with the gang."

"The deuce you did!"

"Yes. Crump and Berry were with them. Berry was wiped out, Crump wounded, and Bodie got away with a broken arm. Oh, it was fun while it lasted!"

Tom almost shed tears over his loss. There had been a scrimmage, and he had had no hand in it.

The Englishmen, since the treachery of Bodie, were now glad to have the famous band of Deadshots with them, as they seemed to be well-trained plainsmen, and fully able to cope with the red men and any other dangerous men of the wild West.

They readily consented to go into camp where they were until Buffalo Bill, Jr.'s, wound could heal. Game was plentiful enough in the vicinity to afford them a bountiful supply of provisions, and the time was passed in target practice and other amusements.

The Englishmen were never tired of witnessing the many feats of marksmanship displayed by the young Deadshots, and they almost doubted at times the evidence of their own eyesight, so utterly incredible did they seem. The killing of a sparrow on the wing by a rifle-shot was one of the many feats daily performed by them.

Under the teachings of Burt and others, the Englishmen attained a high degree of proficiency in the use of the rifle.

"The safety in personal encounters in this country," Burt said, in talking with the leader of the party, Sir George Farleigh, "is in getting the drop on your man."

"I don't know that I understand your meaning," said Sir George.

"Ah; it means getting in the first shot, or a position to have it if desirable," explained Burt. "It has saved many a life in this part of the world, where a quick eye and steady nerves are so much needed."

During the ten days they were encamped there the Englishmen became thoroughly drilled in the tactics of the rough-and-tumble life of the West, and longed for a chance to get practically to work.

At last Buffalo Bill expressed himself able to resume the hunt, and the party, now

numbering eighteen in all, set out by the nearest route for the plains, hoping to strike the great herds of buffalo as they moved southward in search of good grass.

Up to this time nothing had been seen or heard of Crump and his gang.

"They have been so badly thinned out," said Burt, "that they have given it up, I guess. They never would have thought of attacking this party had they known that any of our crowd were with them. They are sick of our band, Bill."

"Well, if they are not they ought to be," was the quiet reply of the young leader.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SOME CAMP YARNS—LIGHTNING CHASING COYOTES.

THE party traveled several days ere they found any signs of buffalo, and when they did there were also signs of Indians.

"The redskins are on the trail of the herd," said Buffalo Bill, Jr.

"Will they give us any trouble?" Sir George asked.

"That depends upon what tribe they belong to, how many there are in the party, and the temptation they are exposed to," was the reply.

"I guess we are strong enough for any band on the plains," said Burt Edwards, emphatically.

"Dat's er fac," said Jack, who was standing near, "we kin knock er whole tribe ob dem yaller niggers stiff, suah."

"Did you ever fight Indians?" an Englishman asked him.

"Yes, sah—an' licked 'em, too, sah."

"How many?"

"Five, sah—all by myself, sah."

The Englishman seemed surprised, and looked incredulously at Burt Edwards.

"It's the truth, sir," added Burt, laughing.

"Five redskins caught him asleep once, took his gun away, and then undertook to take him alive. But he kicked and butted them about so, they were glad to let him go. He lost his gun, though, which has always grieved him."

The Englishmen laughed heartily, and regarded Jack after that as rather a remarkable character.

That night they encamped on the banks of a small stream, and prepared to resume the trail of the herd at daylight.

"They are not far ahead of us," said Cyrus Cammack, as he noticed several coyotes following the trail. "Those sneaks out there always follow close to them, to pick the bones of any that may fall victims to bullets, arrows, or accidents."

"Are they the enemies of the buffalo?" Sir George asked.

"They are the enemies of everything on the face of the earth. Kill one of their own number, and they will instantly devour him."

"Do they never attack the buffalo and feast upon him?"

"They attack anything alive? No. They wouldn't attack even a jackass rabbit," and the contempt of Edwards for coyotes was very patent to the Englishman.

"Can they catch the jackass rabbit?" Sir George asked.

"Yes, they can catch anything. There is nothing in the animal kingdom can outrun him. He can run so fast as to make a whistling noise through the air like a—"

"Stop!" exclaimed Sir George, laughing, and waving his hand deprecatingly. "I simply asked for information. I don't care to be made game of."

"Oh, you can't swallow it, eh? Well, by jingo! but I'll prove it to your satisfaction tomorrow, perhaps."

"Do you mean to affirm as truth what you have just said?" Sir George asked, surprised at Burt's language.

"Of course I do. I never lied in my life," and Burt looked as solemn as an owl.

"What is it?" Cyrus asked, suddenly catching the look of surprise on the Englishman's face.

"Mr. Edwards was telling me about the extraordinary speed of the coyote, and we thought he was exaggerating," was the reply.

"I don't think anyone could exaggerate it," remarked Cyrus. "There is nothing on land that can outrun him. Why, sir, I have shot at him within fifty yards as he was running directly from me, and the bullet seemed

to have merely run him a little race, the beast keeping just ahead."

"Oh, that'll never do!" chorused the entire party of Englishmen.

"Dat's er fac!" chimed in Philosopher Jack, preparing several prairie fowl for the fire, "and when de bullet got left, de kyote ud turn roun' an' larf—yes, sah, larf at yer, shuah. I nebber seed but one ting as could catch 'um—nebber."

"What was that, Jack?" Sir George asked.

"A streak ob lightnin', sah—forked lightnin'. De kyote seed it er comin' and he turn an' pull away, sah, as ef ole Nick war a gwine for him."

"Well, did the lightning kill him?"

"No, sah. It jes' got close enough to scorch his tail, an' den gin out. De ha'r smelt strong when it burned, and dat kyote jes' flewed all de faster, an' didn't nebber stop till he see de sun shine again. He am afeered ob de lightnin', sah."

That was too much for both Deadshots and Britons. They all burst into loud guffaws, and tendered Jack their congratulations.

"Your jokes equal your shots, Jack," said an Englishman, wiping his eyes of the tears his excessive laughter had caused to flow.

"You'se call dat er jokel!" exclaimed Jack, in great surprise. "You'se jes' wait an' see de kyotes run from de lightnin'. Shoot at 'um an' see how fas' he kin git ober de groun'. Why, massa, he makes er hole in de air when he's bad off for ter git home. He don't want no wings, he don't. He boun' ter git home fust all the time, suah."

The hearty laugh was greatly enjoyed by all, and in due time Jack had supper ready for them.

The savory smell of the broiling prairie fowls caused the coyotes to come around and sniff the air most wistfully, but they took good care not to come within pistol shot of the camp.

Jack and Teddy stood guard during the night, and at daylight they had eaten breakfast, and were on their way southward on the trail of the heard of buffalo.

"They are over there," said Burt Edwards, late in the afternoon, pointing in a southwesterly direction.

"How do you know that?" Sir George quickly asked.

"I see some Indians hanging on the flanks of the herd trying to pick off a straggler without disturbing the main body."

"I fail to see any," remarked Sir George, looking in the direction indicated.

"Your eyesight is not so good as mine, then," said Burt; "look again and see if you cannot see several moving objects in the distance out there."

"Ah! I believe I do. I could never have found them at that distance. Your eyesight must indeed be strong."

"Oh, yes, I can see a great way where anything is moving."

"Do you think the game is over there?"

"Yes—I know it. We can't strike them before morning, though."

"Can we have a shot at them, then, do you think?"

"If they don't make a sudden move during the night, which is not at all probable."

Thus the party moved forward, hoping to reach a copse of wood in the distance, where they expected to find water for themselves and their tired horses.

They reached the timber some time after dark, and at once proceeded to make a comfortable camp for the night.

The Englishmen had two comfortable tents which they pitched just in the edge of the timber, whence they could look out upon the prairie, over which the silvery moon was smiling softly, mellowing the scene as by enchantment.

But the presence of Indians after the herd of buffaloes caused the young Deadshots to exercise due caution. They put on double guards in the timber, and single ones out on the prairie when they prepared to turn in for the night.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BILL TAKES A FORCED RIDE ON A BUFFALO'S BACK.

IF Buffalo Bill, Jr., and his men expected a visit from the Indians whom they had seen that day, they were doomed to be disappointed, for nothing but a few coyotes came within rifle shot distance of the camp during the night.

But the Deadshots never relaxed their vigilance a single moment, as they never took any chances on appearances.

When sunrise came they saw the great herd of buffalo quietly grazing out on the prairie, seemingly unconscious that their mortal enemy, man, was hanging on their flanks with hostile intentions.

"Those Indians seem to have increased in numbers during the night," said Buffalo Bill, Jr., as he gazed at the few horsemen to be seen with the naked eye. "I wonder if they had any success in picking off stragglers through the night? If they are securing meat for winter use they do it differently from any Indians I have ever seen."

"Oh, they are not meat hunters," said Burt Edwards. "They are nothing but young bucks hunting for sport. You do not see any of their pack horses around, do you?"

Sir George Farleigh listened in silent admiration at the remarks of those young plainmen, who noticed every little incident, and read passing events by such lights as they would never have seen by themselves.

"How shall we commence work on that herd out there?" Sir George asked, gazing admiringly at the sea of black, shaggy monsters away out on the plains.

"Ride up on their flanks, and picking out a big fellow, shoot him down. Make sure that you have settled him, and then go for another. We generally get several before the herd takes the alarm. Be careful and not get in the way of their rush when they start, for nothing can turn them aside. They will plunge in and swim the deepest river."

"So I have heard. How many do you suppose are out there?"

"There may be fifty thousand. No man can tell. I've seen twice as many making a rush southward."

"Do they never do any mischief on these rushes?"

"Not much, for the reason that there is nothing on the prairie to be destroyed except grass. When a large herd sweeps along the grass is as effectually cut down and destroyed as a fire could do it. Their sharp hoofs cut it all to pieces. Some years ago a camp of emigrants, consisting of three families, was run over by buffaloes on a dark night."

"My God! Did they escape?"

"No. They were literally wiped out and off the face of the earth, so far as human eye could see. Wagons, horses, and everything were destroyed. Two or three hundred thousand huge monsters rushing and trampling anything under foot effectually destroys it, you may be sure."

"I should think so," replied Sir George, with a shudder, as he looked at the herd. "I have never fully understood their power till now."

"Breakfus!" sang out Jack, and the party turned to and did ample justice to the hot breakfast the ebony Jack had prepared for them.

The meal over, they called a council of war, and consulted as to what should be done about the camp.

It was finally agreed to leave the tents standing where they were, and the entire party to return to them when the day's hunt was ended.

"Don't get out of sight of the timber, gentlemen," said Buffalo Bill, Jr., "or you will be lost, and then good-bye for your chances of ever seeing England again. You can't avoid being scattered in a hunt like this, but be very careful. Your safety depends upon your discretion. Now mount and follow me."

The party mounted and followed the young leader out on the prairie toward the grazing herd of buffaloes.

"Scatter along up this side," said Buffalo Bill, Jr., and Burt Edwards and Cyrus Cammack led off at a brisk canter, followed by the others, leaving Buffalo Bill, Jr., in command of the other end.

A few straggling buffaloes which had wandered out of the line looked up and saw the hunters as they rode toward them, and made a dash for the main body of the herd, greatly alarmed.

But as the bellowing and tramping of so many thousands drowned the snorts of alarm the few stragglers made, the herd never dreamed of the presence of danger.

When everything was ready the hunters selected their game and opened fire.

The crack of the rifles were not heard one hundred yards away, so great was the noise

made by so many thousands of the brown, shaggy monsters.

But several was brought to their knees, and a few fell dead, shot by the Deadshots, who knew just where to aim.

One, two, three rounds was fired, when those nearest the hunters took the alarm and stampeded, going southward, bellowing alarm to the others, and in a few minutes the rush commenced.

By a strange fatality, a wing of the herd swept around and almost encircled Buffalo Bill, Jr., and Jake Sourboch before they were apprised of their danger.

"Great God, pard!" yelled Jake, his face as white as a sheet, "look there! run for it!"

On came the brown, bellowing wave of monsters, and in another moment they would be overwhelmed.

They wheeled and put spurs to their horses, and flew like the wind. They were in the center of a curve like a horseshoe, and were straining every nerve to get beyond the two ends so they could turn and let the roaring cyclone pass.

Buffaloes are swift runners, yet the two brave hunters would have escaped had not the two ends suddenly closed.

"We are lost!" cried Jake, but his voice was drowned in the mighty roar of the rushing mass of infuriated beasts.

Buffalo Bill, Jr., was as cool as an iceberg. He well knew the danger, and that only cool judgment and activity could save him.

A huge bull ran into Jake's horse and threw him over. Jake fell under, and the herd passed over him. In a second or two he was a shapeless mass.

Another struck Buffalo Bill, Jr.'s horse, and down he went. Bill had disengaged his feet from the stirrups, and, as his horse went down, he sprang upon the back of a huge bull buffalo, seated himself firmly, and clutched the long, shaggy hair of his neck and shoulders.

The horse went down and was trampled out of existence in a few minutes.

When he started to run, Bill swung his rifle strap over his shoulder, so as to have the free use of his hands. He had, therefore, a good clutch on the buffalo.

The others rubbed his legs hard, but he could stand that, so long as they didn't strike with their short horns.

The bull was a huge, powerful fellow, who plunged along at a fearful rate. He tried in vain to shake him off. So many crowded him, that he could not turn either to the right or left. To stop was impossible, because thousands upon thousands were crowding on from behind.

To fall was death. He must go on or perish. The beast seemed to know that, and so he plunged madly forward with his comrades.

Mile after mile were passed, during which Buffalo Bill, Jr. did not even get a glimpse of the ground over which he was being carried so fast, so thick were the monsters around him.

But a ray of hope came to him. On the left he saw that he was nearer to the edge of the herd than when he started. The main body was bearing to the right. After awhile he would be clear of the rushing thousands, unless the bull he was riding should turn to the right also.

He took off his hat, leaned forward, and struck at the right eye of the bull. That greatly alarmed him, and he roared and bellowed and plunged headlong to the left, getting nearer and nearer to the edge every minute.

Bill repeated the stroke with his hat until he had got the bull out among the stragglers, where he could ride more freely. But he was still too near the main body for safety, and he drove him still further to the left.

He looked back and saw countless thousands still following, many hundred in a direct line behind him. The danger was still imminent, and so he guided the mad buffalo still further to the left by a judicious use of his hat.

Then, when he was out of the line of the stampede, he drew his revolver, pressed the muzzle against the bull's neck, and pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DEADLY WINCHESTER.

THE reader will remember we left Buffalo Bill, Jr., riding a wild buffalo bull, and that he shot him with his revolver in hope of being able to kill him.

To dismount would be dangerous as long as the bull was so lively. He knew the danger, and, though the shaggy monster had saved his life, he resolved to make certain of his safety by making sure of the bull's death.

When the revolver was fired the bull shied to the left, trembled a little, and then with a bellow dashed on madly, trying at times to shake off the relentless enemy on his back.

"How many bullets can you hold in your neck?" Bill muttered, between his lips. "I'll give you another," and leaning forward he planted the muzzle of the revolver against the bull's neck again and fired.

With a roaring bellow the bull turned clear around, as though stunned by the shot, and, believing he was about to fall, Bill sprang to the ground, alighting on his feet.

But in a moment he saw his mistake. The bull's eye was streaked with blood. Blood was also flowing from his distended nostrils.

Bill would have given all he was worth to be again upon his back.

The bull, relieved of his load, ran some ten paces away, and stopped to see what it was he had been carrying on his back for over twenty miles. He seemed enraged at ascertaining that it was something he could easily toss in the air on his short horns.

So with a bellow he lowered his head and charged madly at Bill, his namesake.

Bill had just time to unsling his rifle, but not to cock it, when the mad bull was upon him.

Nimble as a squirrel he planted one foot on the bull's head and raised, or rather the bull raised him, some ten feet in the air, landing over behind on his feet.

With a triumphant bellow the bull turned on him again, expecting to find him all broken up by the fall.

But when he turned that terrible Winchester repeating rifle was facing him.

Bill pulled the trigger, the ball entered his head a little above and between the eyes, piercing the brain, and the great shaggy monster dropped to his knees, and then rolled over on his side, dead.

"That ends it with you and I, old fellow," said Buffalo Bill, Jr., resting his gun on the ground a moment as he gazed on the dead bull.

The herd was still sweeping southward in a resistless current, and were stretching away in the distance while thousands still were far behind, pouring madly forward in the wake of the sea of brown and black.

"I wonder if they will follow the herd in search of poor Jake and me?" he muttered, as he stood and watched for the rear of the herd to appear.

An hour passed, and the main body of the herd had swept by, only a few stragglers plunging along, their mouths flecked with foam and their eyes, when they could be seen, fiery and fierce-looking.

Behind them came a band of Indians, firing at a few stragglers, but evidently on the lookout for something besides the huge game rolling away over the boundless prairie.

There were about a dozen or more of them in sight, and not knowing where they were from or what tribe they belonged to, Buffalo Bill, Jr., concluded that the safest thing for him to do was to conceal himself from them if possible.

He went to the dead bull on whose back he had ridden in the stampede, and laid down by the side of it, placing the carcass between himself and the Indians.

"They will pass without noticing this one, as they are not after the meat," he muttered to himself, as he lay down on the grass.

But he was mistaken.

One of the Indians rode up close to the dead carcass, stared at it a moment, saw our hero lying by the side of it, leaped from his horse, and rushed up to where he lay.

Seeing concealment no longer possible, Buffalo Bill sprang to his feet.

The astonished savage tried to draw a revolver from his belt, but Bill, who had his in his hand, got the drop on him, and the rascal went down with a bullet in his brain.

"I had to do it!" muttered the daring young Deadshot. "And now the others are coming for me! I'll have the whole gang to fight!"

The others had seen their comrade dismount, and naturally watched him from their saddles. When they saw him fall they uttered shouts and yells and dashed in that direction.

"If I can't catch that horse I have jumped from the frying-pan into the fire," said Bill,

advancing cautiously toward the horse, who seemed to be more intent on watching the retreating herd of buffalo than the movements of his master.

At last Bill caught him, and sprang into the saddle. He had on his spurs, and driving them deep into the flanks of the horse, sent him bounding away to the left.

With yells and shots the Indians pursued, firing their rifles as they rode.

"Ha! Their bullets can't reach me!" exclaimed Bill. "But I'll see if mine can reach them!" and stopping the horse, he turned him so as to enable him to face his pursuers.

Raising his repeating rifle to his shoulder, he took a quick aim and fired.

The savage tumbled from the saddle, shot through the heart.

"Now for another—bang!" and the other one leaned forward and clutched the neck of his horse.

"Now give us another, old friend," said Bill, coolly, "and then we'll push off a bit before they get me in range."

The third shot emptied another saddle, the savage tumbling headlong to the ground, evidently dead.

"Now away with you!" cried the Deadshot, putting spurs to the horse, who answered nobly to the command, bounding away with glorious speed, taking him well out of range of the savages' rifles.

When he had ridden a mile or so, he turned and gave them three more shots, emptying as many saddles in almost as many minutes.

This appalling loss checked the pursuers. They stopped and collected together, fired a volley at him and watched the result.

They were too far off. Their rifles were ordinary muzzle loaders, and could not reach a half mile with any accuracy.

Bang! went the Winchester again, and down dropped the seventh man.

Only five more were left.

They were quick to decide on a retreat, and away they went to get out of range of that far-reaching rifle.

"I'll finish you if this horse can keep up near enough!" cried Bill, and putting spurs to his horse he dashed forward in pursuit of the five flying savages.

Bang! another one tumbled, shot through the back.

The remaining four seemed utterly panic-stricken, dashing wildly forward as fast as their panting horses could carry them.

But they could not get beyond the range of the deadly Winchester, and another and another went down, till only one remained of the whole band.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CUNNING AGAINST CUNNING.

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Buffalo Bill, Jr., as he plunged along in pursuit of that single savage. "A good horse and a Winchester rifle will get away with a whole tribe of the red devils. If they come too fast, you can run out of their range and still bring down a man at every shot. If they retreat you can pursue and yet keep out of danger. Ha-ha-ha! how that poor devil is frightened. He hugs his horse like a squirrel on a limb, hiding from a small boy with a shot gun. I'll have some fun with him," and bringing his deadly rifle to his shoulder, again fired at the horse, crippling him so that he could not run.

The savage leaped to the ground, seized the bit and forced the poor wounded animal to lie down. No sooner was the horse down than the savage crouched behind him, making an effectual breastwork of his body.

"By George!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, Jr., suddenly halting and gazing at the spot where the horse went down, "that man is no fool. If I get within range of him, he'll give me a bullet! Why in thunder didn't I think of that before? Confound it, I didn't want one of the yellow rascals to escape me! If he can keep me at bay till dark, he can get away."

And so he could. Bill remained in the saddle for some time watching the horse, the top of whose side he could just get a glimpse of over the tall grass.

He didn't know what to do. To advance on the Indian would be to place himself within range of the savage's rifle, which was something he did not care to do.

What, then, could he do?

He would not go away, and thus let the rascal escape. Buffalo Bill, Jr., was not a

very forgiving man, though he was far from being cruel in his disposition.

But he hated Indians, and this one savage, if he escaped, might arouse his tribe to pursue him to death, or even stir up a general war against the whites, whereas, if he, too, were killed, there would be no one to tell the story of their taking off.

"I'll have you yet, my yellow bird," muttered Bill, as he dismounted and walked about in the tall grass to rest his limbs after so much riding as he had had that day.

Suddenly he saw a white handkerchief waving on a ramrod above the horse behind which the savage had taken refuge.

"Oh-ho! You want a truce, do you? Is it a surrender?" and, mounting his horse, Bill waved his handkerchief in response, and waited for the savage to show himself.

But that the Indian did not do, though he kept on waving his handkerchief.

"Halloo!" yelled Bill, at the top of his voice. "Do you give it up?"

The white flag remained over the horse all the same.

"What in thunder does the fellow mean, I wonder? And, come to think of it, what's an Indian doing with a white handkerchief, anyhow? Hanged if I don't believe he's a white man, and he's trying to draw me up in range of his rifle. Oh, throw me another piece of cheese, Mr. Ratcatcher!" and the young Deadshot chuckled merrily over the ruse of the cornered savage.

Buffalo Bill, Jr., waited hour after hour for some kind of a demonstration from the besieged Indian, but he remained close behind his horse during all that time, apparently without making a movement of any kind.

"He's waiting for the stars to come out," said Bill, "when he will try to sneak off. I say, you yellow-bellied sneak!" and he raised his voice to a pitch that might have been heard a mile away. "Come out and fight like a man!"

The white handkerchief waved again, but not an inch of his person would the wily savage expose to the deadly aim of the young Buffalo slayer.

The horses of the others being without riders, naturally came up to the only man in sight, and before the sun went down all of them except the wounded one were grazing within a stone's throw of Buffalo Bill, Jr.

"Hanged if I don't creep up on that chap before he gives me the shake," muttered Bill, and slinging his rifle over his shoulder, he dropped on his hands and knees and commenced crawling through the tall grass in the direction of the Indian.

He made rapid progress, and in ten minutes raised his head above the top of the grass to take survey of his locality.

The white flag was still flying, and he concluded to make a detour and thus get in the rear of the Indian. Nearly a half hour was spent at this, but he reached the spot he was trying to make just as the sun had sunk out of sight, bathing the evening sky in a sea of gold.

He was now about fifty yards in the rear of the Indian.

Suddenly he unslung his rifle and arose to his feet, prepared to get the drop on his enemy.

There lay the horse and there stood the ramrod with the white handkerchief on it. But where was the Indian?

"Gone, by the gods!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, Jr., as much disgusted as surprised, as he dropped back down in the grass again. "But he'll try to get one of the horses and make his escape under cover of darkness. I'll hang on to you, my sharp fellow, until hunger drives me away."

Creeping forward to the horse, Buffalo Bill, Jr., saw that the wily savage had planted his ramrod in the ground, and fastened a dirty cotton handkerchief to it as a flag of truce, for the purpose of deceiving him.

"Hanged if he hasn't crawled forward," muttered he, noticing the trail through the grass in the direction of the horses. "He might have picked me off if he had been a little more quick about it. I'll follow his trail and see which way he has gone."

It was easy enough to follow the trail of a man crawling through the grass, so all that Bill had to look out for was not to run upon his foe before he could see him, and thus get shot after all his trouble.

As he neared his horse, Buffalo Bill, Jr., began to go slow and cautiously, knowing the foe must be close by.

It was now getting quite dark, the stars coming out and flecking the evening sky like so many twinkling stars.

Suddenly Bill thought he noticed one of the horses making movements that were not quite voluntary.

"Oh, you're there, Mr. Savage, are you?" he muttered. "Well, I'll keep an eye on you," and creeping rapidly forward he got within twenty paces of the horse.

He could see that the horse was being led forward by some one in the grass.

He crept closer and closer, till only ten steps divided them.

At last, thinking he was far enough away in the dark to mount, the savage arose to his feet and sprang into the saddle.

Bang! went Buffalo Bill, Jr.'s revolver, and the savage tumbled to the ground again.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DEATH OF CRUMP—CONCLUSION.

WHEN the savage fell to the ground there was a groan and a muttered oath that seemed very strange to Buffalo Bill, Jr., as coming from a wounded Indian.

He knew the stoical nature of the redman under such circumstances, and, therefore, thought it very strange that one should swear when wounded.

Suddenly the wounded savage arose to his feet and staggered toward the spot where Buffalo Bill, Jr., had dropped back into the deep grass again, saying hoarsely:

"Come out and show yourself like a man."

"Why, that's good English for an Indian!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, Jr., springing up and giving him another shot that sent him reeling backward several paces.

The man fired wildly, caught his side, reeled sideways, and then fell heavily to the ground.

"Who are you?" Bill asked, running forward and bending over him.

"I am Crump," said the dying man, feebly. "You have triumphed at last. My band is wiped out, curse you!"

For a moment Buffalo Bill, Jr., was too much astonished to speak.

He never dreamed that he had been fighting Crump's band of horse-thieves all day. They had evidently followed him for the purpose of finding a chance to wipe him out.

"Well, you don't blame me, do you?" he finally asked the dying man.

"No. I tried to wipe you out," replied Crump, "but missed. My band are all gone. We had made this last effort."

"Well, I am glad to hear that, for we shall have no more trouble in the future. Is there anything you would have me do for you? I will pledge myself to deliver any message you may—"

"No—no?" said the dying man; "I will not reveal my true name. It would do no good. If you could get—me—some—water—"

"There is none in miles of this spot," said Bill. "I am sorry for you. You are a brave fellow and I would—"

"No matter—no matter," said the dying man, "it will soon be over."

"There is no one you would have me say anything to?"

"No—my men are all dead. You—are—lucky man—charmed life. What—kind—of gun—was—it?"

"My gun? Oh, that's a Winchester repeating rifle. Shoots sixteen times without reloading," replied Buffalo Bill, Jr.

The man gave a groan, and rolled over on his side.

"Oh, it's horrible to die thus," he said, when the paroxysm of pain had passed.

"It is indeed," said Bill, sorrowfully. "But I will stay by you till it is over." But maybe you are not as badly hurt as you think."

"Yes, I am going fast. It will soon be over," and another paroxysm of pain came on, during which Bill thought he would drop off.

But he came to again, very feebly, though.

"I will—ask—one last—thing—of—you," he said.

"What is it? If I can I will do it for you."

"Bury me underground—don't—let—the—wolves—eat me."

"Yes—yes—of course I will."

"Thanks. I—forgive—you."

"And I freely forgive you, Crump," and Bill took his hand in his, and held it till he gave the last gasp and died.

"Gone," muttered Bill, dropping the lifeless hand and arising to his feet. "The whole band wiped out by the Deadshots! I never dreamed of such luck. He was a bold, bad man; but he is gone now. I promised to bury him, but I don't know how I can do it; I have nothing but a knife to dig a hole with. If I could only find my men I could bury him decently. If I remain here all night I will be no better off on the morrow than I am now. I'll tie him to a horse, and carry him back to camp—if I can only find it again."

The horses were still grazing near by, so he had but little trouble in catching them. They still had on the saddles and bridles of their owners.

Taking the halters off of several, he took one horse, removed the saddle, and secured the body of Crump on his back. Then tying the other horses together, and mounting the one he had captured, he led the whole batch westward till he struck the trail of the herd of buffalo.

"If I follow this back to where the stampede commenced," he said to himself, "I will be sure to find the camp. How far that confounded bull carried me is more than I know."

Then striking a brisk canter, he kept it up for hours, and at last saw a glimmer of light on his right.

"That must be the camp," he said, and forthwith made for it.

"Ah, there's the timber! Yes, that's the camp. By George, but I am glad enough to see it."

"Halt, there!" cried the well-known voice of Cyrus Cammack, as our hero approached the camp.

Buffalo Bill, Jr., halted.

"Who are you?" Cyrus demanded.

"Bill Eaton," was the reply.

"May I be shot!" exclaimed Cyrus. "Boys, get up here, quick! Whoop, bang!"

The Deadshots sprang up from their blankets, as did the Englishmen, also, with their weapons.

"What is it?" several cried at once.

"The ghost of Buffalo Bill, Jr.!" cried Cyrus, as Bill dismounted and approached the light.

"De Lor' gorrarnity!" yelled Jack, the first to recognize him. "Dat amn't no ghost! Dat's Marse Bill, suah!" and the darky plunged forward, took his daring leader in his arms, and literally ran around the fire with him, setting him down in front of Sir George Farleigh.

"Halloo, boys!" cried Bill, cheerily, as he looked around at the astonished men, "how many buffaloes did you kill?"

"How did you escape alive?" exclaimed Burt Edwards. "Here we've been half a day

picking up little pieces of meat and bones and rags, trying to give you a decent burial."

"Then you buried poor Jake," said Bill, sadly, "and I've brought another fellow whom I promised to keep the wolves from eating."

"Who is it?"

"Crump."

"No!"

"Yes—I wiped him out to-night. There he is on the horse."

"Why, it's an Indian!" exclaimed Joe Bledsoe, examining the dead body on the horse.

"All those Indians we saw out there when we struck the herd were Crump's men in disguise as Indians. They are all dead now. Not one left, so Crump said before he passed in his chips;" and Bill then quietly explained the manner of his escape and the terrible fight with Crump's band.

Simple as was his narration, the astounded Britons could not believe it. It seemed incredible to them.

"I know you don't believe it, gentlemen," said Bill, "but there are the horses. You saw the herd close in on poor Jake and me. You saw us go down. You see me alive now. To-morrow I will show you the dead bull and the other dead men. Now give me something to eat, for I am ravenously hungry and thirsty."

Jack had him a nice buffalo steak broiled in less than ten minutes, which he ate heartily and then felt better.

Five of the party volunteered to bury Crump in the edge of the timber, and set about it at once, while Bill sought the sleep he so much needed.

The sun was up some time when he awoke. Jack had a good breakfast for him which he ate with great relish, after which they struck tents and started south on the trail of the herd.

Buffalo Bill, Jr., found the dead bull and the corpses of the band of horse-thieves.

Sir George grasped Bill's hand in his, saying:

"I could not believe your story last night, Mr. Eaton. To-day I could not doubt it. It was the most wonderful feat I ever heard of in all my life. History or romance has nothing like it. The world shall know of it. I hardly think they will believe us when we tell it in England."

Buffalo Bill, Jr., blushed and said he did not think it such a wonderful thing to do, as it was all owing to the far-reaching qualities of the Winchester rifle.

They then resumed the hunt for the herd, and during the next two or three weeks many a huge buffalo bit the dust. Sir George and his companions returned to Cheyenne completely satisfied with the expedition, and returned East to embark for England.

The horse-thieves being all wiped out, the band of Deadshots had literally nothing to do, but kept up their organization for social enjoyment, and had regular shooting matches every year, taking every prize offered in the West for marksmanship.

Buffalo Bill, Jr., married Jim Ruggles' prettysister, who makes him as tidy a little farmer's wife as one could wish to see, and she makes Bill as happy as the days are long.

Philosopher Jack has also found a wife, and is the happy father of three little ebony pickaninnies, the eldest of whom he calls "Buffalo Bill."

The others of the Deadshots are still as we found them, happy, daring and true men of the border.

[THE END.]

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